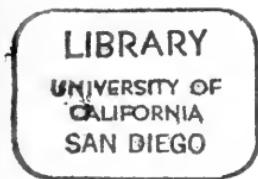


HEAVEN AND  
CHARING CROSS

ALICE  
HERBERT

16 Feb 1972  
D.N.



✓ Kleis Robert



# HEAVEN AND CHARING CROSS

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

GARDEN OATS  
A NOVEL

THE MEASURE OF OUR YOUTH  
A NOVEL

BETWEEN THE LIGHTS  
POEMS

# HEAVEN AND CHARING CROSS

BY ALICE HERBERT



“—— the traffic of Jacob’s ladder,  
Pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross.”  
*Francis Thompson.*

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED  
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To Mohun and Amy Ashfordby-Trenchard, in  
memory of days of Sanctuary ; to the Bracken  
Hut and the Holy Well ; to the Great Wood, its  
silence and its voices ; to the voice it will never  
hear again.



# HEAVEN AND CHARING CROSS



## CHAPTER I

**I**. WHO have known them all—poor Adela, her husband, young Martin and the rest—will tell you of their lives.

Here, in my spinal chair, with one supreme exception, my life is only inward. Fulfilled and filled again though it may be, I welcome all adventurers, their loves and lusts and failures and high hopes. My sympathy has grown a chamois-hunter. It scales the heights, as I once scaled that actual mountain that threw me from it into this most subtle chair. Instead of play of muscles, I now have play of springs and cogs and sympathetic wheels. No woman (but the one) has ever answered to my hand and mood as does my chair. At first each movement squeaked a “Finis” to all my hopes and lusts and loves. Now, hopes are all for others, lusts are put to sleep for ever. If love remains, it is because a miracle was sent ; but this is not my story.

Knowing them all so well, hearing the story from so many sides, I could supply the very words they often used. It is all clear enough to me. The task will be to show it as it was. No one could make it quite uninteresting. I have the qualms of him who

paints a group. Some one will dominate, disturb the balance ; some other will shrink back into the shadow, like a silver-point beside a coloured poster. I will try my best.

Martin I hardly envy. Adela I pity, because I sinned for her. That is a help and not a hindrance to the painting of her. She needed love and pity more than all the rest. I am responsible for much of what she did, and I should be a prig as well as hypocrite to paint her with the colours that her world would use. I loathed her husband and I tried to save her from him and to save her from myself, and then to save young Martin from her. All this saving might have ended in disaster.

“ The one excuse for Adela is Henry.”

This, being uttered by a cousin of Lord Henry, was received as axiomatic and pretty often quoted.

“ Henry is just an Act of God,” another woman said. “ You cannot even blame him. You endure him.”

Indeed, he was in all truth blameless. He was a faithful husband—none more faithful. His feeling for a woman was conditional upon her virtue and her intellect. Let her be beautiful as Venus and convicted of flirtation or of unpaid bills, his blood ran coldly in her presence, he met her softest smile with stony eyes. Let her advance one unsound argument, and there was no condoning of adorable folly on the ground of sex. Guests had been known to find it difficult to keep back actual tears. Poor Adela would have

preferred to feel a little jealousy, rather than so much vicarious compunction. Frank churlishness may be forgiven : Henry was icily polite—basilisk rather than bear. Never in all their married life had Henry lost his temper, banged a door, let loose a normal British damn, or failed in meticulous politeness at the table. Adela sometimes felt that for a man in Harris tweeds who smelt of smoke, had a tremendous laugh (Henry's rare laughter was a titter), swore at a bootlace when he broke it and hugged his wife when she said something sweet and silly, she could have walked barefoot through Piccadilly.

Without this solace she walked nearly barefoot. The meanness of the man was hardly credible—in some directions. That was the worst of Henry. He was so seldom wrong in the world's eyes. To all the depressing necessities of life his purse was sparingly open. To every single one of all its graces it was locked. Adela, miserably conscious that all her longings were for things not strictly necessary to right-thinking British matrons, tried hard to curb her tastes—the cigarettes that Henry never shared, the flowers, the tea in dainty tea-shops, the taxi on a rainy night, the pretty shoes that did not last, the graceful dress that would not “wear” like serviceable coats and skirts. On her absurd allowance (her husband had two thousand pounds a year and neither chick nor child) not one of these things could be had without an abyss of debt. She fell into it—hopelessly and often—and paid for it so heavily with scenes of

icy bitterness, prolonged for weeks and frequently recurred to, that a sense of being wounded would swamp her naturally tender conscience. She grew extravagant with the extravagance of despair.

Her house she left to go to rack and ruin. After the dainty wedding presents that half furnished it were smashed and not replaced, she gradually lost all house-pride. Rather than the bathos and triviality of incessant mourning over the sagging seats and broken backs of her arm-chairs, her fading curtains, threadbare carpets and vases void of flowers, she shut her eyes to all these things, and soon they ceased to vex her. Of course “bad housekeeper” was the kindest name her friends with good allowances for “up-keep” found for her.

That her husband cared nothing for her beauty, had no pride in it, was a secret wound that rankled. Out with a married couple, she once shed tears behind her veil. The man had stopped before a jeweller’s.

“If only I could give you those jade earrings!” he had said wistfully to his dark, pretty wife. “How gorgeous they would look with your black hair!”

“Old silly!” said the wife, but gratefully. Poor Adela’s heart ached. If Henry had but once betrayed a loverlike, foolish impulse that one might discourage with a generous “Old silly!” Ever so little good-will would have stood for deeds with Adela.

Her brains affected him, but to hostility. Before

her marriage she had been a brilliant girl, "the clever one" of a dullish circle and her family. I have noticed—over and over again I notice it—that sparkle and vitality themselves can seem a sort of wit. I found myself the other day eavesdropping (unintentionally) upon a pair of humble lovers, my second housemaid and a tradesman's boy. I lay among the lilacs in a spot new to my chair. It is so poetic a spot that lovers are infinitely more suitable to it than my prosaic, hospital-suggesting presence. I could have made a noise and stopped the two. I thought poor Rose's red and shamed confusion, when next she met my eye, might still be saved if I lay quiet, so I stayed—and heard.

It was an innocent conversation, all guffaws and giggles, or I would have risked the blushes. As it was, I found myself quite hugely entertained. Rose did not say a single word that you would smile at, given here in print; the smile was in her youthful voice and all its racy intonations—also, I imagined, in her rather piquant little face. You could not fail to feel that each retort was witty.

The same with Adela in her gay youth: she had a brain and she was often witty. That she was really brilliant apart from her vitality I now doubt. I have seen her robbed of it, and now she is not often brilliant. But, in the old days, give her but a touch of admiration, rouse the humour or the sense of sex in her, and her great brown eyes would flash, her black head would lift gallantly—and out would come some ripple of

bright words, of no more worth than glass, perhaps : but glass in sunlight has a diamond shine.

Her husband robbed her of all that and left her poor indeed. A woman of a stronger resilience might have stood against him. Hers, so fatally dependent on response and atmosphere, simply failed. It was the pathos of it that first made me—how unluckily !—her champion.

We were at dinner. I was dining at her house. I had just spoken to her, leaning close, with the attention that she loved. She flashed an answer, drawing in her husband—it took her long to leave off doing this. He did not act precisely like Diana's "gentlemanly official," though Meredith might well have painted Henry. He did not "kill her bright laughter with a 'Yang, yang, yang !'" but he did worse. He stopped elaborately in some laboured speech that he was making, held us all still while you could count a dozen, then resumed his speech without a word to her. She flushed, gave an unsteady little laugh, and piteously continued talking—with the sparkle gone.

I was unconsciously at that time on the look-out for fellow-creatures in distress. She whom I had a right to champion—oh, yes, I was a married man—had little need of me. From Madge and all her hard sufficiency I turned to every one who seemed as cruelly alone in heart as I was. So began the sweetest friendship and the most unhappy *liaison* of my life.

At first, I swear I had no thought of any harm. What her thoughts were, God knows. I was the

average man, less gross than most, perhaps, and less strait-laced than some. Piccadilly had no lure for me ; though, meeting Piccadilly *dépaysée*, I had sometimes found it pathetically human, young and likeable. I had been more careful of the reputation of women of the world who amused themselves with me than the same women wished. I had, of course, injured no virtuous girl, and so far had been the lover of no married woman who was not a finished *intrigante*. Adela seemed to me in need of tenderness, not passion. I burned to make her feel that she might sparkle and be petted for it, that all men were not frozen churls. I wanted her to have the birthright of her glowing youth ; and though she was a handsome woman—very handsome when she knew you thought her so—she did not stir desire in me, at first, so much as pity.

Fatuous as it may sound, Adela would not leave it so. It was not pity that she wanted. Pity is honey with the sting left in. She writhed already under a mass of pity from every one who knew the pair. It was admiration that she wearied for. I soon found that to give her back the consciousness of power and beauty was to give her life. She could not hear too often of her looks, her charm. To a woman I adored I could hardly have paid so many facile compliments. Her eyes would have made my heart beat too fast for a tongue so fluent in their praise.

Who denies logic to women ? They are so logical that our discrepancies of act and word have poor chance of escaping them. Adela argued, all but

verbally, that a man who perpetually assured her that she was desirable must desire her. I could not tell her brutally that, in the circumstances, I, perhaps priggishly, desired her happiness and not her love. I verily believe that gratitude on her part and politeness on my own began our curious intimacy—a situation of some rather ghastly humour.

However it began, it ended seriously enough. She clung to me in all too real passion. (Mine is not the conventional chivalrous retrospective attitude for a man to take, and I am quite prepared for the contempt I probably deserve. The facts remain that this book will not appear, if it appears at all, during the lifetime of the people it describes : and that it has no value whatsoever if I falsify the truth.) To shake her off might well have been to kill her. Not once was I happy in my conscience—hardly even in my senses. I was in the grotesque position of a man who continues to do wrong from the almost conscientious motive of a fierce compunction. It is unthinkable to break a tie when a woman you are genuinely fond of tells you daily that it is the mainspring of her life.

“I thank God every day for you !” she often said.

The words jarred, but they touched me too. I was a fool, perhaps ; but comically little a seducer.

And then Lord Henry found us out.

Of course it was a letter. If women had not learned to write, the Divorce Court could be turned into a tea-room. Adela wrote to me—pathetic, rather witty letters—every other day. I answered them, more

sparingly, with caution, for her sake—a constant grievance. The exposé did not come from any word of mine. It came because she left a letter in a blotter. The letter began :

“ My husband, my Arthur ! ”

A more comprehensively fatal four words could hardly have been invented. Adela’s style was not so luminously terse at other times. One can imagine the “ That will do, thank you ! ” of the imp that guides the female hand. Few forms have been filled in with such conciseness, to give the information wanted and no more.

Lord Henry, amazingly, did not press home his advantage with much fury. In fact, by the irony of fate, it put him into permanent good temper. The world would now endorse his own opinion as to his wife’s inferiority, and no more need be said. He filed his petition without acrimony, took up his abode at an hotel, leaving his erring wife the flat to live in, and a sum of money that, by beautifying her pinched life, would probably have kept his blameless wife still blameless.

Of course my thoughts turned to the “ righting ” of Adela in the world’s eyes. The thing had got about. Her circle knew of Henry’s altered domicile, in the next street but one. Also, in secrecy, she had made the usual confidences, with the usual result of embarrassing those friends who had known the state of things already and only asked not to be told about it. These took to filling her vases with condolatory flowers, but

ceased to fill her letter-box with invitations. They kissed her with some real sympathy in private, and forgot her Christian name at other times.

“It *is* so easy *not* to be divorced!” said one, whose love affairs were known to every one then in London but Mr. Justice Bargrave-Deane.

My difficulty was my wife. It was not the usual difficulty. Madge Ponsonby had married me for money, and I had married her for a faultless profile. Since we both retained these attributes, we should have been content. As I had mistaken the attraction, in my own case, for undying love of Madge, and the lady had had no such fair illusion as to her own motives, I came off distinctly second best. Otherwise not even weak good-nature would have led me to deserve that short communication from Henry Curtis’s solicitor.

Meanwhile my wife and I, who rarely met, were on the easiest terms of frank indifference, punctuated on her side by many a “Darling.” How frosty that particular endearment sounds from frosty lips I learned even on our honeymoon. When Adela, poor girl, said “Darling,” it was like another word said in another language. Decidedly, to lose me would not have ruined Madge’s life. It hardly would have altered it. I proposed to leave her most of the income, let her divorce me quietly, and take Adela to some cheap equivalent of the usual “Villa on the Mediterranean.” I foresaw an endless lifetime of listless affection, punctuated by Alpine climbing when I could leave my bride without brutality.

Then Madge astonished me. I was prepared for every attitude but hers. To my amazement, she professed great love for Adela, and—most bewildering of all—entire belief in our joint innocence, reducing me to speechlessness.

“ Let her come here and stay, poor girl ! ” she said, “ and we’ll defend the suit. *I* don’t mind going into the witness-box and swearing that I believe in both of you ! She’s just the little sentimental sort of fool who’d call a man her husband if he looked at the same sunset she was looking at, or liked the same bits out of Rabindranath Tagore.”

To protest to an emphatically trustful wife that you have wronged her with the friend whom she is championing is a situation which some men might tackle with success. It was beyond me, frankly. I left the thing to Adela. She was as puzzled as myself, and disappointed. She had counted on Madge’s indifference setting me free to marry her. We had discussed the chance at once. And here was Madge, posing as the one loyal friend who would believe no wrong ! Adela began to regret those numerous confessions, starting with her confession to Lord Henry on his discovery of the fatal letter. She accepted Madge’s life-belt, since Madge had evidently no intention of handing over the ship to her. I could have still brought off the Villa plan : but the result would still have been the same. Madge would have had to face the facts : but she would still have held me cynically bound. No help to Adela in that,

I drew the line at having Adela to live with us—that situation was at least impossible—but I could not prevent my wife's appearances with her in our small car, or her public championship of her on all occasions. To know that Madge was spoken of as “poor dear Mrs. Carey” in consequence added the last touch of irony. Anyone less likely to be the victim of a generous innocence than Madge could hardly be conceived.

Why did she do it? At first I asked myself that question. Then I knew. At present I was Arthur Carey, in my small way a fairly eligible husband, with my three thousand a year and my lack of demand on my wife, who neither ordered my dinners, saw to my wardrobe, mothered my children nor (to put it delicately) ensured their existence. The post of Mrs. Arthur Carey was, in fact, a decently paid sinecure. The post of Lady Carey in the not too distant future, with another thousand or so added to the income, was even more desirable. Madge was not quite the woman to forego it from desire to make another woman happy; or, to do her justice, to see another woman shamed. So there I was, with both hands tied, incapable of doing much for Adela.

It looked like deadlock, but it was not to last. Two things occurred to change it all—occurred in the same week. Lord Henry first got influenza—then pneumonia; then he died. And I, proud member of the Alpine Club, climbing a fourth-class peak, by a mild route known as “The Ladies’ Way,” must needs, by

a quite insignificant fall, injure my spine for life, and view the universe henceforth from a supine position that has changed it curiously.

Madge acted quite correctly. At intervals she came and sat with me. Her real unconcern quite strangely made her presence only half the strain it might have been. She read or chattered, self-absorbed. I rather liked to see her sitting near, with her clear-cut face and burnished hair and really beautiful neatness of dress. What tired me, sad to say, was Adela, who also sat and was a pleasing sight, but turned great eyes of tragedy upon me every time I moved. She did not love me any more. Her love was largely of the touch, peripheral; and I loved her as much and little as I ever did; but whereas I kept up no plaintive sweet pretences (a spinal chair excuses stark sincerity), she could no sooner face an unpoetic fact than grow a beard. If all the Martin business did no more than show her that we were not permanently blighted lovers wringing our hands at fate, it still did something.

Henry had left her just four hundred pounds a year—her narrow marriage settlement. But for those fatal confidences, few would have known of that abortive filed petition. Adela could have stayed about among her relatives and her in-laws and made a happier marriage. As it was, she faded out of life in her own set. The set below her own (oh, so very little below; so quite presentable !) adored her and invited her. Among her own, the slightly tarnished ones with the bright hair and the shady judicial separations leered

at her as at a sister. These she had always abhorred. The kind people in the streets "*quite close to*" streets one knows she did not loathe ; but there was a *déclassée* sense that came upon her when she found herself unchangeably the centre of their gatherings, and noticed the slight touch too much of deference in some of her hosts, and the over-familiarity of others, who wished it plainly known that the daughter-in-law of a Marquess was nothing in their sight, as probably in God's.

Adela was certainly not happy. True, she had lost the frosty touch of Henry on her life ; but I at least had helped to thaw the frost, and here I was, a log without the warmth of logs. I made her welcome when she came to me. (Although I seem to write untenderly, for truth's sake, I have never been untender towards Adela, or ceased regretting all I helped to bring upon her.) I gave her much affection, and small luxuries when birthdays or festivals excused it ; but there it ended—so far as I was concerned. It was obvious that Adela's emotional experience, handsome and "*temperamental*" as she was, would hardly end with Henry in his grave and me in my spinal chair. The quiet life in the airy little flat on the north side of the Park, with the delightful spinster I had found to share expenses and play chaperon, would not be hers for ever.

This brings us to her visit to the Burkes. She hardly knew them, though they were her relatives. I knew them through and through. If quiet Mrs.

Burke ; the handsome Major, lover of all women *pour le bon motif* ; beautiful Buffer, whose beauty might have changed my active life, as it has changed my living death, if I had known, and waited for her ; and gay, bewitching little Jinny—if all these could not bring a breath of honeysuckle to a fevered heart then no one could. I engineered the visit and rejoiced in it. Martin I had not reckoned on. I scarcely knew the boy, and did not realize his presence ; a proof that the man who tries to play Providence should realize that he has not the omniscience of his model, and be wary.

And now I will let others tell the tale awhile, and speak no more ex cathedra. (Alas, my piteous Chair !)

## CHAPTER II

“ **D**EAR old thing,” wrote Lady Henry to the spinster friend who shared her flat, “ *me voici*, very safe and sound. I wonder if you’re missing me by this time !

“ The gallant Major met me at the station and drove me home in one of those awful wagonette-things that make you sit all sideways ; but I sat next him on the box, so didn’t mind. He really is a dear soul—and so handsome ! Features quite Greek, and curly hair just grey. It must be years since last I saw him (the year I first met Arthur—fancy !). He’s better-looking now than he was then. He half delights one’s vanity, with all his little compliments, mostly in funny French, and half puts one off by patently adoring his wife and by being so obviously a dear old saint, in spite of all the gallantry, and expecting you to be the same.

“ His wife is hardly any older than when I saw her last. She has let her figure go, and doesn’t bother about fashions : but she has the skin and hair and eyes of twenty-five. It’s wonderful—an advertisement for matrimony and motherhood and country life.

“ Doady ! How is it that her type of woman makes

me lose my nerve? It's not because I feel a sort of Magdalene. I don't. Besides, I'm not: not really. I don't think many women of my kind, married to Henry, would have stood him half so long or half as well as I did. You've admitted that. And it's not because she's extra virtuous. She's just a nice, kind, wholesome Englishwoman — rather shrewd. They make me feel a horrible constraint. I feel as if I ought to weigh my words. With really saintly people, like dear old Father Campbell, I feel happy. Why is it? The type has always paralysed me. It's so absolutely unmistakable—so entrenched in good repute—that it makes me feel meretricious without feeling either humble *or* wicked. You know what I mean. I feel as if it distrusted me the whole time, and was too well-bred to show it.

"I don't know that I have an exaggerated respect for it. It's largely made up of its circumstances (if that makes sense or grammar!). Let any girl be born into Mabel Burke's nice Rectory, married at twenty-odd to her delightful Major, cherished for years and years by him and by her children (I'm coming to them directly) and I don't much see what she could do to be lost! You don't go off the lines when they are laid in extra pleasant places.

"The funny thing is that I *like* the type. I loathe the woman with the painted eyes and yellow hair who toadies me and always seems implying 'You and I . . .' It's like a spiritual 'nudge. If I belonged to either kind it would be Mabel Burke's,

not hers. I must be like a Peri (what heaps of women think they're that !) not an inhabitant of either world. That's why I feel uneasy with them both. I think the rather sweet simple people, with a spice of harmless naughtiness, who think me 'wonderful,' and don't know how to criticize, suit me the best ; or else the understanding saints.

" The daughters, funnily enough, are rather specimens of those last two types. Bertha, the elder one, called 'Buffer' by the family, has a noble little face and loving eyes. (She's pretty too ; they both are. They have the negligible English breasts and hips, but that is attractive—or we think so nowadays, when every one is Atalanta and nobody is Venus, much less Juno. Their faces are as fresh as red-tipped daisies, and their hair is anything from brown to gold, according to the light.) I can imagine, young as she is, making a little Mother Confessor of Buffer, rather than of her mother. (I don't suppose I *shall*—don't worry !)

" The other—Jinny—is a little duck. Already she begins to follow and adore. That type makes me adorable at once. (I *am* a vain ass ! but isn't it always true that to make *any* woman adorable, you've only to adore her ?) Jinny's love will 'sweeten my bread' while I am here. (Do you remember that Hungarian song, how exquisite it was, with the little quick fall at the end, the Hungarian syncopation ?)

" My dear ! the cream is yet to come. There is a Beautiful Mystery.

" Its name is Martin, and it looks—say twenty.

It's the only son. Of course I knew there was a boy. Not one like this. Doady, he's *beautiful*—that's the only word. Sir Galahad, a young Archangel, a poet, a Crusader ! No, you needn't gibe ! I've not declined on boys, the 'last infirmity'—not yet. Besides, he hardly knows I'm there. He gazes at the tree-tops and he whispers to the angels—at least, that's what he looks as if he did. The funny thing is, he's the skeleton in this decorous cupboard—obviously. They don't like questionings about him. I've seen that more than once. I shall plumb his mystery and get his confidence. It will be something for me to do.

" I don't know yet about the cigarettes. I shall go mad if I mayn't smoke. I'm smoking now ; but everything is open, and I have the attar spray and mean to make away with the guilty remains ; but it's the first I've had since starting. Pray for me that they'll endure it after dinner ! Fancy one's coffee without a cigarette !

" In all respects but that,

" Your comfortable, affectionate

" ADELA.

" P.S. I'm wearing the dark blue chiffon with the modest V for dinner, with a pink rose and the black pearl earrings Madge and Arthur gave me. I shall look a Comely Woman of the World—even if I have not three children and a stainless conscience and a milkmaid skin and thirty inches of waist !

" I'm not catty. I'm self-protective. You need

it here, without so much as a motor-bus to give you confidence."

A few days brought her back a characteristic answer :

" DEAR ADELA,

" I know the feeling you mean. It's simply a Bad Conscience. Your comfortable matrons aren't usually condemning you particularly. You feel as if they were. And you might have been born into twenty nice Rectories without becoming Mrs. Burke—so don't talk cant.

" Myself, I never understand the craze for having every one alike. A world that has Cordelia and Cleopatra and Lucrece and Lady Hamilton and Florence Nightingale and Catherine of Russia, and all the hosts of women in between, interests me enormously. You may take your choice of all these ladies if you insist on labelling yourself. Most women love to think themselves great sinners or great saints. As a matter of fact, very few of us have the pluck to be either. We're mostly 'in between.' Call it being Peris, by all means, if you must be picturesque at any price.

" Don't confide in the lovely daughter or infatuate the pretty one. I know it's no good, or I should say Don't, for any sake, start a flirtation with the son. Remember, you're supposed to be the only woman in England capable of an enduring *grande passion* (the most boring thing for any man to bear—but never

mind that). The trouble with your Beautiful Mystery is probably his stomach.

"Do you good to smoke less cigarettes. I'm sending you a hundred.

"DOADY."

Adela very likely thought that *I* would show more sympathy. Showing sympathy doesn't require much muscular effort, so I practically show it from ten till six every day, in default of a more virile form of exercise. At any rate her next epistle came to *me*.

"Arthur, my Dear," she wrote, having all too little fear of my *femme complaisante*, "I cannot tell you how I miss you. Oh, Arthur! etc.

"They are all angels to me here. St. Martin (not St. Michael) and all Angels. Buffer is all you said, and more. Arthur, she has the very highest feeling for you! You should just see her when I say your name. She has the fairest, sweetest face I ever saw.

"I love the dear old Major and his Mabel ('Ma Belle' he always calls her—isn't it sweet?) and Jinny is a pet. But Arthur—tell me about Martin! What is there that embarrasses them all? At first I thought he was a sort of ultra mystic. Now I know him better, he seems an ordinary well-bred youth just down from Cambridge, rather slangy and quite healthy-minded: and yet at times there are queer touches.

"Dinner, for instance. He will hardly ever eat it like the others. He hates to have it noticed, and the

family does too ; but he always takes two dishes and no more. Then there are other things. If you ask Mabel Burke about him—his career, and all the things you talk to mothers of—she always shies away. I mean to get his confidence, as I told Doady. She said, of course, that I should 'flirt' with him. Why are the cleverest women commonplace on that one subject ? As if my heart were not too sore to 'flirt' ! Oh, Arthur ! etc.

"At dinner yesterday we happened on your name. I said how good a friend you'd been to me, and looked—looked rather hard, you understand—at Cousin Mabel. She smiled quite nicely, and looked straight at me, so simply that I was *sure* she doesn't know. She's not the sort to hide things. The Major caught my eye and gave me the most naïve frown. He knows, the dear old thing, and won't say nuffin'. Buffer looked softly at me, and said (in such a lovely, gentle voice), 'It must be worth most things to anyone, if Arthur Carey is their friend.' It wasn't grammar, but it *was* so sweet !

"The Major really is a pet ! He called to me that evening, 'Come out and take a little stroll, *ma belle cousine* !' I went, of course. He led me to the shrubbery, cleared his dear old throat and pulled at his moustache. At last he brought it out. I wasn't to misunderstand him. Mabel was the finest woman in the world, and quite the kindest ; but some things are better not repeated, even to the best of wives. Why worry them ? They mightn't understand.

" In short, he knew about us—you and me. Dear Mabel didn't, or, of course, the girls, and I could feel quite sure they never should—from *him*. He looked at me imploringly. I felt relieved—enormously—and set his mind at rest. I said I never spoke of the sad past, and looked pathetic, and he loved me, I could see. He said ' Poor girl ! poor girl ! much better not. *Much* better not ! ' patted my hand and tore back to his Mabel.

" Of course it sounds as if I held things lightly and was ' making capital.' Oh, Arthur ! *you* would never think, etc.

" He *is* adorable with Mabel—the ideal husband. Some husbands would call Cleopatra ' Wifie.' Gerald does just the opposite. Dear Mabel is too plump to be romantic, but he makes her feel so. He bends over her hand and kisses it when he lights her bedroom candle every night ; and every single day he lays a rose beside her plate. She puts it in her dress, looks stouter than before, smiles placidly at him and says ' Kidney and bacon, dear ? '

" Jinny is like my little dog. She thinks I queen it in a *salon* and diplomats are kneeling at my feet. She wishes twenty times a day that she were just like me. Alas ! And yet I would not change. Arthur, you *know*, etc.

" Yours always, always,  
" ADELA."

Poor girl ! I think she more than half believed in

our joint blighting. At any rate there was no bitterness, no jealousy about her. The way she spoke of Buffer shows you that. If it were not for Buffer (what an "if" !) I sometimes wish I could have loved her truly.

How foolish—how unutterably foolish—the reasons given for loving or not loving! They talk of "winning" love—when was it ever "won"? You win affection or respect or fifty worthy things. You don't win love or cholera or genius or an earthquake. I hoped, without much conviction, to love each woman that I ever kissed. If many waters cannot quench that fire, neither can much fanning ever light it. It is of lovelessness that I have thirsted to be cured—never of love. Who, gifted with the Stigmata, would wish them to be healed ?

## CHAPTER III

**A**DELA got her way with Martin. Of course she did. What boy of twenty-two, eager for sympathy, had a chance against her?

The mystery was slightly disappointing. Martin had a mission—so it seemed. He also had a gospel. But when you came to it at last, it did not hit you with revelatory force. In fact, it seemed a truism.

Love. The assuming of goodwill. The literal following of Christ. No compromise. That was the boy's platform. His career was hanging in mid-air until he settled with his conscience how his life could best be used to further these great ends.

"But surely there are many—" began Adela.

"Why, yes!" cried Martin. In a torrent of words he showed her all his thought. There were millions who professed these things. At first they meant them single-mindedly. Then came the compromise. "We mustn't go to extremes." "We must use common sense." And the machinery got in their way. The thing became a commonplace. It ceased to stir the hearts of men.

"That is the thing, you see—I'm sure you see!" he urged. "That is the only problem. The world is

full of people whose shoes I'm hardly good enough to black, who have come to this—they're saying words, without conviction, words they believed in once, to ears that listen without hearing. Why, don't you know how difficult it is to make a thing come home to you that's too familiar? To call the righteous to realization rather than sinners to repentance is the real job just now. The sinners have been told so often. They know all about it, mostly. It's we smug, harmless people, who just aren't doing any wickedness when we might be lifting up the world, laying it nearer to the feet of God. . . ." He stopped, a little flushed and flustered.

"It all sounds beautiful—but rather vague," Adela told him. What was he driving at exactly? That was the fault of preachers as well as politicians. You asked them what they meant to *do*, and they used words that would have "Cheers" in brackets after them, if they had been used outside a church: but they never answered you.

"I'm trying hard to answer," Martin said. "I've settled what I mean to do and I've begun it. But it's on a tiny scale. It's only my own silly self that's reaped the benefit, so far. I want to reach the million others who might come in. Perhaps you'll show me how to reach them. Look here! I'll tell you about Burnaby!"

"Oh, do!" said Adela. There was nothing else in sight to interest her. The boy was most attractive. . . . If there was anything in his vague schemes,

in time she would be told it. She watched his sensitive, fine face and felt a likely convert. Poor Adela ! to do her justice, the appeal to her senses was invariably through her soul. So much the worse for her and all her type. They dig, with blood and tears, a deep foundation for a house of cards, which the first breath of satiety blows down.

“ Burnaby,” said Martin impressively, “ was the most wonderful man I ever met.”

Adela kept a reverential silence.

“ He was my own age, of my year. Apart from music, I didn’t know at first how much he had in him. But one day we got talking, and I found out what he lived for. I had heard chaff about him from the other men. They liked him, all of them, but they thought he was a little touched, I fancy. He used to go and talk to crowds, down at the Pool ; and he had wheels put to a piano and wheeled it down himself and played to them—just to start his audience (That’s what gave me the idea about the singing. I’ll tell you by and by). He called it the big drum : but it was a very small piano.”

“ I suppose he talked . . . religion ? ” ventured Adela.

“ He talked of what he thought religion meant. He wasn’t any kind of Churchman or Dissenter. His notion was that all the things the world was really suffering from could change in one week if it saw what Christ came to show it—and *acted on it*. He took Chesterton’s saying that Christianity hadn’t been

tried and found wanting. It has simply been found difficult and left untried. Here and there, of course, it's had a chance ; but he wanted *England* to try it—not just a little group of people who get labelled 'cranks.' "

"It's a large order," Adela observed. She felt a hoary-headed, disillusioned cynic at the very thought of the two "men."

"It's a gloriously large order ! "

"How did Mr. Burnaby propose to get at *England* ? "

"Well, he thought if every one who felt like that just *lived the life* himself—didn't mind seeming the most ghastly prig and crank, you know, but just thought of himself as a *tool*—it would be a nucleus, and it might spread. And then, if any of them had the gift of words, and could go through the country talking *hard*, it all might help. After all, the disciples must have had a pretty hard job when they went forth like that. They hadn't even been to Cambridge ! "

"Well, you've not lost your sense of humour over it—that's one thing ! "

"No, one needs one's sense of humour, and one's health, and any mortal thing one has," said Martin with a business-like air that tickled Adela. "Burnaby thought that I had some sort of a face and some sort of a singing voice that might be useful. So he raked me in. But whether I have words or not, I don't know yet. I may dry up and be an awful frost."

"You certainly have some sort of a face!" said Adela involuntarily.

"Well, I don't think it's going to be much use," said Martin, with a ludicrous absence of self-consciousness, "it looks a bit ridiculous to me—too good to be true. Little Henry and his Bearer kind of thing. (Burnaby's face had *strength*, now, if you like! You felt a *man* was trying to talk to you.) But if it does at all for a big drum, so much the better! What about the voice? Do you fancy it would carry in the open air?"

"I don't know. It might coarsen it, and spoil it."

"That's what it's there for—to be spoilt!"

"Well, it's all very charming and enthusiastic. No one would want to discourage you. But—have you ever thought how many there are already at it? All the sects? There are some hundreds in London alone." Adela had read "Heterodox London" in her youth and remembered the depression it had caused her.

"Yes of course there are!" said Martin, "we love them *all*! We want to lend a hand wherever we go. We'd begin by calling on the ministers of every one of them, all through the country, explaining that we shouldn't clash, and preaching for them if they wanted us to."

"But why not join one of them out and out? Surely one does more that way!"

"I don't think so. If we find we can't get on as

free-lances, that's what we'll do. But they're all tied up to something. The details seem somehow to have changed places with the essentials in most of them. You have to think about the water before the Holy Ghost with Baptists, for instance. I may be wronging them, but that's what their books and sermons sound like, often."

"Well, do you think they'll let you preach for them when you have all the values different?"

"I don't know. We'll try."

"Who is 'we,' Martin?"

Martin's face saddened. "It used to be Burnaby and I," he said, "and now—there's only me."

"You pathetic boy!" said Adela. "It's like the Children's Crusade; and—I *don't* want to throw cold water, but—do you think you'll get any further than they did?"

"Possibly not so far," said Martin, "but it's tremendously well worth trying, Cousin Adela!"

"That's the best part of it, to my mind," said Adela, "that you have found something you think worth doing. Every man should find that."

"Good heavens!" said Martin, "that's the least of it, to me. Why, it might have been racing, or breeding pet poms!"

"It comes to the same in the end, don't you think? You might as well take the 'seven maids with seven brooms, and sweep and sweep and sweep' as try to get sinners free from sin."

"Oh, we hadn't thought of tackling that just yet!"

We want to set Christians free of compromise."

"Oh, compromise is the enemy, is it? I should have thought it was just part of the working of the machine. You have to give a little as well as gain a little, even when you're pushing through a crowd to help some one who's in urgent need of help."

"I know," said Martin, "but Burnaby always felt that it was the real curse. You have to come out of it before you get anywhere. Most of the Saints knew that."

"Did Mr. Burnaby propose to be a saint?"

"Well, I think he really *was* one—but he'd have loathed me to say so."

"Did he die, Martin?" asked Adela softly.

"He died when he was twenty-one. Just before the end of his second year."

Adela murmured something sympathetic. For the life of her, she could not think of Martin's saint and mentor except as an enthusiastic child.

"And did he want you to carry on his schemes?"

"Oh, yes, he knew I should!" said Martin simply.

"The singing is one of my promises to him, for instance."

"How do you mean?"

"I thought perhaps you noticed, the other night. It always makes me feel a fearful prig. I only want Father and the rest to say they'll be really hurt if I don't—then I'll warble anything they like."

"Did you promise never to sing love-songs?"

"Oh, no, not love-songs, specially. We had a sort of notion—we were rather young then—that he would keep his piano playing and I my singing-voice for only one thing. We made a sort of—consecration. If Burnaby was still alive, I'd alter that. I hate the idea of breaking the promise, now he's dead."

"I see. I wondered, certainly."

"Yes, it makes people wonder; and I don't care a hang when I'm alone what kind of a freak they think me; but it's mean to drag my people in. And one of the dangers is that the whole thing may be put down as some kind of beastly priggish pose. Half of the tiny world that ever hears of one at all will think one a sanctimonious ass trying to seem better than the other asses, and they'll discount everything one tries to say. Or, if one tries extra hard not to give that impression, there's the other danger. The being at ease in Zion and familiar with the Almighty—the Billy Sunday stunt. Billy Sunday does no end of good, I fancy; but one wouldn't try and do it just that way. Oh, it's going to be uphill enough! I realize that!"

"How do you mean to get at anyone?"

"Well, that's the crux, to start with! Father wants me to take Holy Orders. He says—and he's absolutely right, of course—that no one need wish for wider scope than a pulpit and a parish give a man who really means his job. They're tied down, anyway, to listen to one then, poor dears! But I don't feel orthodox enough

to sign one article, much less thirty-nine! I don't believe it would be honest. I want to get right back to the beginning, as far as I'm concerned."

"But you agree that everything alive develops? You don't think tradition is worth nothing, and old beliefs?"

"No, no," said Martin, "one would have to be a conceited jackass to belittle it. But—well, it's frightfully difficult to put, but—Look here! you know when you stroke a cat on and on in the same place! At first it simply loves it, and it purrs. Its nerves answer to the stroking. Then, if you go on and on, always in the same place, it grows quite numb. It doesn't 'answer' any more. If you go on still longer, it'll suddenly turn quite brisk and matter-of-fact and jump off your knee!"

"Yes, I know what you mean," said Adela, "you think these things have all gone dead by being harped upon."

"Well, haven't they? Do you know, all the time I was a boy, I was awfully bored with the Bible—all except certain bits I liked. The Psalms, for instance, except the 'waters of Babylon' one, used to weary me at Evensong. I almost hated them. Then, in my first year at Cambridge (as late as that) I began reading the Bible in French for a bit. It was amazing, the way in which the sentences took meaning. One had to think, you see, of what they really meant, and how they may have sounded then. Most of the stuff isn't

a patch on our Authorized ; but the point is, they weren't familiar *sounds* any more. They all came home to one."

"Yes, I can quite see that ; but you can't hit on any way that people haven't tried before. You can't stop people as they're shopping in Bond Street."

"Why not ? If there was not another way ?"

"Oh, my dear boy ! Even if you did, there is a formula for that. Cracked street preacher. Religious maniac, or something. Rather a pest, they are. Well-meaning, though ! "

"Yes, I suppose so. Yes, I know. But, look here, Cousin Adela ! Do you know one solitary soul in your own set who really tries to carry out the thing in every detail ? I don't mean, do you know any people good enough to make me feel a worm. Of course you do. (Besides, I *do* already, honestly !) I mean, do you know anyone who isn't turned aside from heaps that he would like to do by all the nice, sensible considerations ? Because that's my idea. That would do something, wouldn't it ? If every one of us refused to be sensible when it clashed with religion. Supposing one never got a public hearing of any kind ? One might at least keep one's own doorstep clean. Then there's private conversation. I met a man once who was so keen upon the Navy League that he lived for it. Well, a stranger never met him for ten minutes without his beginning to fill him up with Navy League. They laughed

at him of course ; but some of them listened. One youngster went and called on him about it—and now there are two : like inverted Little Niggers. Don't you think it might work ? "

Adela had been watching rather than listening. One can imagine disillusioned but impressionable thirty-seven watching brilliant twenty-two. Poor girl. She started when the boy stopped talking.

" Don't you think "—she hesitated—" that it would be very hard to bring in sacred things . . . names, for instance—on most odd occasions ? "

" Oh, one needn't." Martin was launched again. " I'm keen on thousands of things that all belong. When it had dawned upon them that I was only talking Christianity, they might be disappointed, but the thing would be done, as far as I'm concerned, directly they discovered ! "

" What are the thousand things ? Tell me a hundred of them ! " Adela settled herself—I can see her—like a Persian cat among her cushions.

" Oh, I say ! I'm taking the meanest advantage—"

" No, I love it. Go on telling me."

" Well, they all come down to one thing—Love, of course. But most people seem to want to go on just as we are, with hatred and rivalry and jealousy and things, and cultivate love as well. It's like putting onions and potpourri into the same jar. Look at politicians ! Can anyone in his sober senses believe that every one on his side of the house means super-

latively well and is high-principled and clear-sighted and straight in every way, and every one the other side is a rascal or a fool? A Christian House would have no parties. They'd just *assume goodwill* in one another, and consult together. How can we help the poor? How can we help the rich? And when they disagreed, they'd disagree like a jury—not like a garden full of angry cats. It seems so obvious."

"But if they had to follow one policy or another, and each side thought the other's policy a rotten one?"

"Of course! I know it isn't simple. But, come now, Cousin Adela! Wouldn't the assuming of goodwill still help the thing enormously? There wouldn't be 'one side,' to start with. They'd take a show of hands, and go by the majority. Half the time, it's not the cause the politicians fight for. It's to score off the men they've always tried to score off."

"You can't change human nature, little Martin."

"Oh, can't you!" Martin strode about the room. "That's just a counsel of despair. You know it is. It gets changed every day, like the water in the public baths! that's all you know about it!" He looked down at her. As he was Martin, that was nothing. But she looked up at him—and that was much.

Upon my soul, we are too hard on women! Here if we—we men of any age—see and adore the youth and freshness of a sweet, good woman, are we hooted

at for making it our own, or for the natural impulse? Why, in God's name, must women play that they are deaf and blind to youth and beauty? Why must they feel ashamed for loving and desiring it? I have never found it ridiculous when a mature woman has married a boy, or taken a boyish lover. I feel that she is selfish in the first case and in for certain sorrow in the other—but ridiculous? Never, in the name of all fair play. Nature shows that it does not offend her. In nine cases out of ten, the poise of the older woman is the complement to the freshness of the boy. But Nature is neither constant nor monogamous, and therefore no respectable authority.

Adela watched the sunset on his hair from the shadows of her corner. She has told me of the scene till I can see it with her. My chair makes me a fine confidant—no sexual *parti pris*.

"Well, we change the House of Commons to a Fathers' Meeting. What comes next?"

"A Brothers' Meeting, couldn't you say? Well, take War next. You can't say consciences are not awake about it. There's no more jolly blustering and Jingoism—or very little, anyway. All modern nations, when they fight, begin to show that they're doing it from a sacred sense of duty. They justify their actions all the time. You must have noticed that. No joyous going for the Hittites, to smite them hip and thigh, because we want a scrimmage. We reluctantly chastise them, to make them nicer to the Jebusites. The result's the same, of course: we let not one of them

remain ; but it's the uneasy conscience that's the sign of grace. If I were forced into a war—and men who felt like me—we'd have the 'Messieurs les Anglais, tirez les premiers' tone, I suppose. We'd repeat every single kind or brave or generous thing the other side did (we wouldn't call him the 'enemy' at all) and we'd leave praise of our own deeds for some one else to give. We'd be frightfully careful that the poor brutes left helpless in our country shouldn't be made to feel their position too cruelly ; and nothing should be too good for the prisoners——"

"At that rate, both sides would burst into tears on the battlefield and run into each other's arms and say, 'You are such darlings, we really can't stick things into your tummies !'" remarked Adela.

"Exactly ! Precisely ! Exactly !"

Martin gave a caper suggestive rather of the playground than the pulpit.

"That's my point—my very point !" he cried.  
"You're my first convert, Cousin Adela !"

"Ten years of years," said Adela.

"Before it comes ?"

"Before you came, I lived."

The boy looked rather puzzled.

"Do you mean it's cheek, a kid like me ?"

"That wasn't what I meant," she said.

That night, she wrote to me :

"Arthur, I know the mystery at last. It's the most naïve, touching thing. Martin is up against the same

old dreams that all of us have had—and always will have. The pathos of it is, he seems to think they're new. At least, he doesn't—that's not fair—but he never realizes that every one of us has brought his little bucket and looked out at the sea and wondered 'Can I tackle emptying that?' He says that no one *really* tries. Of course they don't. He means to try, though! How long it will take before he settles down and works the compromise, like all the rest of us, Heaven knows. He'll get some hard knocks first; and, worse than that, he'll get irritating little pats and kind little patronizing smiles.

"He wants opposing politicians to say to each other, 'I know we're all trying for the country's good,' and nations at war to show up all each other's best points until they throw down their rifles in a gush of love. Besides all that, he wants to 'live the life' in private, and he finds that pretty hard. Now, do you think that he could live it at the Flat, and feel his way a bit? He has no scope at all here. Doady would adore him and be frightfully good for him, with her caustic tongue, bless her! And I have a horrid, worldly notion, if Madge will help me.

"You know how Julia Farrowby 'got back' when she was running her hypnotism man? When people found they couldn't get him without her, and he was all the rage, they invited Julia simply everywhere, to 'bring' him.

"Now I think that sort of thing's played out, for the moment. He was a good deal of a fraud; and he

looked as if he never changed his collar. Martin is like a child, sincere and sweet—quite ‘unmistakable’—and as English as the Union Jack, though he looks as if his father were the Angel Gabriel and talks as if his mother were Maria Edgeworth. No, not quite; I’m trying to be clever, but I want to be correct. He talked as the disciples might have talked if they had been to Charterhouse and Cambridge. I believe he’ll be the rage! If Madge will lend her drawing-room—she loves the sort of thing—and let it be quite understood that St. Martin’s cloak is shared with *me* and not with *her* (will she be such a lamb?) I verily believe you’ll see your Adela with the old cards on her mantelpiece again. It’s worth the trial. But they may not let him come.

“Tell me if I’m a mercenary brute.

“Yours always,

“ADELA.”

Now Adela had in all her composition no mercenary nerve. She loved the dainty things of life; but her emotions, not her interests, always swayed her. When I received her plausible account of *why* she wanted this young cub-saint in her London flat, I knew at once that her letter was a lapwing, trailing a wing and giving wounded cries to lead me from the nest.

True, the nest was possibly a mare’s nest: but I had strong suspicions. Adela was in love, and with a child. Mingled with my relief was some hurt vanity; also, to do me justice, pity and apprehension. There

is one only end to that stale situation. St. Martin's summer? Pah! the thing could not be settled with a pun. I did not sleep that night. It was some years since Adela had wrecked my rest.

## CHAPTER IV

RATHER to my surprise, Martin's parents consented. The Major's consent I expected. Your soldier, however uxorious, has small holy horror for sinners as mild as poor Adela seemed in her quiet toilettes and her widowhood—doubly pathetic. The boy seemed a child to his father, and a disconcerting child at that.

“Never do for the lad to turn out a crank!” I could picture the Major reflecting. “Woman of the world—charming, by George! Poor little soul! Hard lines too. Do the boy good. London life for a bit. Find his feet. Meet a girl or two—Arthur's wife knows some of the right kind.” The thing was all settled.

But how of his mother? There is not a woman whom quiet frocks and low heels can deceive. What Mabel Burke thought of her husband's handsome cousin has not been revealed; but those steady grey eyes must have gauged her at sight.

However, the meek, on inspection, will be found to possess their fair share of the earth in this life. When a man has paid tribute for years to a woman's attrac-

tions, has kept old age from her and never neglected to open the door, he has accumulated claims. If he should press one at last, it is sure to be granted. Whatever his Mabel's most *innerlich* qualms, he got his own way. Martin went.

Miss Doane received him with characteristic *sans gène*.

"Shall I do?" he asked, laughing. Her lorgnette had focussed his face a full half-minute.

"Do? it depends upon what you're intended for! As a new toy for Adela, you seem ideal. What else do you expect to be?"

"A voice," Martin said sepulchrally.

"Voices are not a long-felt want," said Doady, "there's more talky-talky done here than anywhere else on God's earth, I should think. Whenever there's trouble, some idiot gets up and makes speeches about it. Then there's a collection to pay for more speeches. Then every one goes home, and we feel that the thing has been happily settled."

"Cousin Adela! she's discouraging me!" said the boy.

"Is she?" said Adela, coming to his side.

Doady looked up at her tone. Her voice is a traitor to woman. She may utter the coldest of wisdom and it will betray her.

"Your young friend has apparently come here to talk. I only told him he'd find one or two already at it."

"Room for another," said Martin. He felt as if

his brand-new morning coat were silver-armour. We have all had such days.

“Don’t heckle the child before he’s even had his tea ! ” said Adela, sinking into a chair before a silver tray of cups and saucers. “I see your bark has been worse than your bite, Doady. You’re really a lamb ! You’ve ordered those cakes I adore.”

“I have. And a double supply for your toy. I expect he’s not really above them.”

“*Above* them ! ” said Martin, his utterance hampered by cream, “outside them is more to the point ! ”

“I say, though ! ” he added, the first cake disposed of, “can you run to them every day ? I’m not being indelicate. I really want to know.”

“I think, with an effort, we could ! ” answered Doady.

“And—do you mind frightfully ? What would they cost—the amount that you’d order for me ? ”

Doady was quick at arithmetic.

“Eightpence,” she answered.

“*May* I have eightpence instead every day while I’m here ? ”

“What do you want it for ? Marbles ? We *might* run to eightpence as well.”

“No, no, that’s no good ! I just want to begin as I mean to go on. Don’t curse the day you ever saw me. Just cut out my cakes and let me give four-and-eightpence a week to the London Hospital. Will you ? I’ve read a most wonderful letter ! . . .”

"We've all read those wonderful letters," said Doady.

"Oh, dear," said his cousin, "we'll both feel uncomfortable now when we eat cakes ! I shall taste ether whenever I bite one."

"Hooray ! you've awakened to sin," chuckled Martin. "You'll soon curse the day that I came."

"You're as bad as two vegetarians and an anti-vaccinationist."

"Like travelling with a goat," said Martin, "it goes as two dogs and a go-cart."

"Where are you going to draw the line ?" asked Doady, interested.

"At decency and health," said Martin solemnly. "A man came down to speak once for our vicar. He said no clothing should be bought except for reasons of decency and health. You should have seen young Jinny's face ! She'd just been given such a coat ! I'm sure the man had twigged it, as soon as she came in."

"Is another cup of tea against your principles ?"

"One more would be, but two more aren't," said Martin. He was in the spirits of a small child at the Zoo.

Who has called youth "infectious"? The women watching him felt age-old in comparison. For myself, I have always felt a boy when greybeards say, "At *your* age I used to . . ." But when a flapper asks, "When you were young, did people . . . ?" I know the weight I carry.

"Well ! Principles seem to agree with you," Doady admitted.

"When every one *tries* to be Christian, the world will be all full of laughter," said Martin. "When I'm in the blues it means that I'm leaving off trying."

"I hate cheery people," said Adela.

"I don't believe you do when you're feeling jolly yourself. It's when one isn't that one wants to kick them in the face."

"Well, one generally isn't. So there you are ! "

"But one nearly always would be. So there *you* are ! It's no good ! You simply can't discourage me to-day. Even my one nightmare's gone to sleep."

"What's that ? "

"The nightmare," said the boy, "of being the most unmitigated, ghastly, ludicrous, and God-forsaken *prig* ! Isn't it funny how we all frightfully want to do what we think right ; and directly we begin we feel so utterly priggish that it nearly makes us stop again ! We feel like the little boys in those absurd school stories who are desperately ashamed to say their prayers ! I believe half of us are conscientiously denying ourselves the little good we might be doing, for fear of looking better than the other half ! "

"You'll certainly be thought a prig if you can't enjoy the ordinary good things of life that aren't a sin," said Adela. She resented the etherizing of her favourite cakes.

"*Can't* I enjoy them ! Try me !" exclaimed

Martin ; " but—look here, Cousin Adela ! Supposing there were only one of these ripping cakes ? You and Miss Doady (may I say Miss Doady ?)—neither of you would touch one. You'd be pretending hard that you didn't want one—because there were *not enough to go round.*"

" Well ? "

" Well "—this time he hesitated—" while there's one hospital in urgent need—*are* there enough—cakes—to go round ? "

" I suppose not," sighed Adela, " but it makes things rather dreary if one has to feel like that at every step."

" I don't believe it does ! At Cambridge, Burnaby and I just tried how many things we could do without. It's really rather fun. You fly so free."

" Sort of Thoreau idea. Well, I fancy you have to begin very young, to find it quite such fun."

" Oh, I don't know." Martin considered this. He thought it might be true. For the first time he felt a little awkward. He could not say that either of his hearers had much youth left. With the unconscious cruelty of twenty-two he classed his handsome cousin with the sturdy, grey-haired spinster. Both were " rather old." He liked them both tremendously.

" I think I'll just go out and mooch around," he said, when tea was over.

" Yes, do ! " said both his hostesses. They longed to talk to one another. It was natural that the boy, all bubbling with his zeal to conquer London, should

wish to see his battlefield. Disillusion would come soon enough.

"Poor child!" said Doady, when the door had closed.

"I can't be sorry for him. Fancy enthusiasm like that! What would one not give——?"

"The greater the enthusiasm the greater the reaction."

"Yes. If you don't admit success at all."

"It is now nineteen hundred years and more. *Is* the thing 'going' yet?"

"No. But it's had revivals. We may see a Bonfire of Vanities in London yet!"

"Don't throw your heart upon it, Addie."

"Oh, Doady, *nonsense*!"

Martin came back in time to change for dinner. He was radiant but a little quieter. At dinner-time he introduced an earthenware pipkin to the spotless, lace-edged tablecloth.

"What *is* that thing?" asked Adela, noting the starting eyes of the trim maid who waited.

Martin looked guilty.

"May I do eccentric things?"

"You never seem to do any others. What's this one to be?"

"I'll show you—if I really may?"

"Oh, I suppose so!" said his cousin. "But it's rather like having a conjuror to dine—you never know what he'll be doing to the glasses."

"I shan't worry glasses much," said Martin, "but this is the jolliest pipkin."

Its use was soon apparent. Martin ate his soup. He then ate heartily when broiled fish was put before him. At the meat course the pipkin came into its own. The first object to enter it was a cutlet. Mashed potatoes followed it, and peas.

"Good heavens!" murmured Doady. "Is this for the London Hospital as well?"

"No, it's for an *awfully* nice woman," said Martin, trying to arrange the mixture so that it looked seductive. The mashed potato overpowered the other contents, and he gazed ruefully upon it.

"She's at our corner," he explained; "she sells boot-laces and matches. You must know her well. Her name is Mrs. Dunn. She has bad varicose veins from standing, and she thinks it's *infra dig.* to sit down on the pavement. Besides, there's a pavement artist just near there, and he's disagreeable if she does; and she's liable to get moved on. Next year she'll have the old-age pension, and her son'll let her live with him and his wife. I thought if we could tide her over just this year . . . I'm going to buy a camp-stool—isn't that a notion, or would they move her on? I didn't tell her we'd give her dinner every day—I didn't know how you'd take it. But I knew you were so decent to me that you'd let me give her some of mine to-day."

"But have you any reason at all to think she's starving?" asked Doady. She remembered the awfully nice woman—a hag with a sinister eye.

"Oh no!" said Martin. "I don't suppose she is.

But she's sure to like this jolly stuff. Your food's the best I ever tasted ! She gets a little bit of meat on Saturday nights. She told me so. I'm sure if I had varicose veins and were sixty-something, I'd love these cutlets ! "

" How do you propose to get them to her ? "

" I thought I'd just slip out with this," said Martin apologetically ; " she's come quite close to the house. She followed me as I came in."

" Is she to eat it with her fingers ? "

" Wouldn't you lend me a knife and fork—just for this once ? "

" Annie," said Doady resignedly, " just fetch a kitchen knife and fork."

" Do they have different ones ? " asked Martin.

" They do," said Doady firmly.

Martin went forth. They watched him from the window. Cherishing the pipkin, he found his evil-looking friend. Clutching her elbow, he stole out of sight with her.

" Adela," said Doady, " I foresee that we are going to be the most compulsorily charitable women within a half-mile radius ! "

## CHAPTER V

MADGE had agreed to the meeting which was to introduce The Child's Crusade, as Adela persistently called it. Adela seemed disposed to accentuate young Martin's relative youth as a sort of disclaimer of any ulterior or amorous motive in "pushing" him. She did this mostly in his absence. I have seen the same disarming candour in a woman who has been inconsiderately made a grandmother at forty. I thought it pathetic then. Now it seemed ominous.

Our drawing-room had undergone a change that dwarfed its fair proportions quite amazingly. A little platform had been hired, which occupied one end of it; while rows of chairs, all uniform and also hired, filled up the rest. It is humiliating to find how small a hall the largest drawing-room will make. I know that Madge felt this. I saw her discontented glances. These softened when her smartest friends, eager for some new thing, came softly rustling in. People had only just come back. It was October, and our set was of that fifth-rank "smartness" that does not

spend its time in country-houses after Goodwood, though it would perish sooner than return to town as early as September. I, who had been so good a match for Miss Madge Ponsonby, the rising surgeon's daughter, was a small pot indeed beside the brazen ranks of true "Society"; but neither Madge nor Adela had ever realized the fact. Henry, the morose, had willingly "dropped out" before he married; and the cards of invitation for which poor Adela so pined were not the cartels of the truly mighty. A little more than Kensington, they were a good deal less than Curzon Street; which is a pity, for Mayfair can afford a scandal that would horrify Bayswater.

This being so, I noted from my chair with satisfaction that my poor friend was likely to be cheered indeed. If all these folk were not the real top-knot on the great Panjandrum's head, they quite adorned his pig-tail. I saw a K.C.'s wife, furnished with three chins and the amiability that goes with four. A Civil Service knight had come in person, his pretty daughter with him in a most bewitching hat. The day was chilly, and there was quite a fine array of furs. Piteous little paws and heads looked out below unpitiful but smiling faces everywhere. All looked "unmistakable" enough to cheer the heart of any all-but-*divorcée*, with the exception of the solitary peeress who was there, and who suggested Burlington Arcade and all its works. Adela stiffened as this lady sailed towards here. Then, as her name, impressively announced, balanced her lip-salve, my handsome friend resumed

the pretty graciousness that was her leading charm.

Madge had been truly magnanimous. Adela received the guests, unknown to her though many of them were. Madge had invited every one—then gracefully retired.

"It's Lady Henry's show entirely. Mr. Burke is quite *her* find—not mine at all," I heard her say to all and sundry. The rows of chairs just made the thing quite non-committal. You met that rather shady Lady Henry Curtis half-officially, as you might meet Messalina on a temperance platform. The fact that I myself, presumably the head and front of the offending, had never been cold-shouldered by our unfashionably irreproachable set, always made me chafe. It would have been the smallest price to pay for all the trouble, and I would have paid it more than gladly. Men who are taught to think it priggish to "save a woman from herself" (which is the euphemism for denying her the only thing she really wants) should realize that nothing they can do, after an exposé, will divert the blame from her.

Oh, the London woman of the thriving, well-fed type that has such charming manners! She is not bourgeois—no, not she! She smiles and talks and dabbles. You can stir her to her depths at any moment; and her depths are as deep as the deepest saucer. She will not deny you sympathy. She is ready at a word with shiploads of it. The poor dear poor, the poor dear Poles, the poor dear animals who

get vivisected by the poor dear clever doctors to help the poor dear souls in hospital ! The poor dear creatures in the street—so badly painted and *such* scent !—but what a life ! Poor dear, you have got a cold ! Poor dear, she has lost her husband ! Poor dear, she's bolted with another woman's. You can't know her now : the poor dear other woman wouldn't like it.

Poor dear, he means so well ! You have to listen. Poor dear indeed, if he thinks to get beyond your ear-drums !

Poor dear God and poor dear Christ ! What in Their names do all these women stand for ? If you prick them, is it conceivable that they will bleed ? Rather than these, ten million times, the suffragette of ancient days, reckless, misled and generous, who smashed the plate-glass window that is so exactly like their countenances. It was in fact those sweetly smiling faces—their damnable, most amiable indifference—into which she hurled her piteous hammer ; and they smiled the more. The poor dear rowdy creature !

“ Madam, that full meal your corset is repressing would have kept the life in a small body that needs no lacing-in, two streets from you.”

“ Madam, the hat above your heavy face is carrying a corpse that flashed the sunshine from its wings a while ago. Why is a sea-gull murdered to adorn your heavy face ? ”

“ Madam, round your plethoric throat there is a

delicate small thing that died in anguish in a trap to keep the fresh air from your plethoric throat."

"Madam, the Beatific Vision shines upon your right. Upon your left there is a milliner's of the first *ton*. I think we will not trouble you with turnings to the right."

And if I said these things aloud, you would not strike me. "He is impossible, of course, poor dear!" It is so middle-class to be a wasp. The slug is our ideal.

All this somewhat Corellian diatribe because I saw the humiliation of a young fool at the hands of a drawing-room crowded with "thoroughly nice" women! From the moment when Martin stepped upon the little platform and met with the decorous gloved applause that is itself so soul-destroying, I could see that he felt it. Every one settled down to listen and be stirred—stirred half an inch.

If the boy had had some novelty to introduce, he might have wakened them a little. To introduce the age-old truisms and show them to be burning, flaming truths that every one is blind to, needs that you have awakened hearts to address. The hearts of all these folk were not asleep, or one might have startled them into a grunt, a jump and an awakening. Still less were they awake. They drowsed, and *had* drowsed, all their lives, just pleasantly aware of other people's tragedies. (How dreadful, dear!) Of all the currents of the world that passed them by they were not

ignorant. Oh no ! they dipped a well-shod toe in every one.

There goes the Ibsen movement—very interesting !

All this new style of painting—so queer and clever. My dear, how naughty of you to laugh ! I must say, *some*. . . .

Yes, that dear Eastern ! such a charming face. His message ? My dear, I'm afraid that's a little beyond me. Something quite mystical—oh, quite ! I always think mystical things are so fascinating. Don't *you* ? Miss Underhill, you know . . . No, I don't fancy she's a spiritualist . . . I don't much think it's ghosts, exactly.

Higher thought ? Oh, *very* interesting ! You just will to possess the earth—and there you are, possessing it. Oh no, not Christian Science—that's played out ; at least, it's flourishing ; but you don't hear talk about it any more.

The Roman Catholics ? Oh, the dearest people, many of them. I always say I expect I shall end by being one. It *appeals* to me, you know. I often go to Mass—so picturesque ! I suppose it's rather naughty of me ? And *you* go to a Synagogue ? How broad of you ! I always say there may be *something* in these things.

At any rate, we will collect them—and collect toy poms. You sell the poms when you are tired and throw away the rest.

Meanwhile, there is this charming boy. Ner-

vous, poor dear ! What is he trying to say ?

He was trying to say, " Oh, change the world with me ! "

The poor dear boy, indeed !

## CHAPTER VI

THE fun was over and it had not been much fun.

A few still stayed behind, and hovered in a group. The others made soft, lingering exits, with gentle pressures of Madge's fingers, and—on the part of those who had no sons or daughters—a little thawing towards Adela. “So kind of you. So *very* interesting !”

“Attend to your penitent bench, my son !” I said to Martin.

He looked behind him, scared, and blushed a little.

“Shut up !” he murmured. “What do they want me to do ?”

An old-young girl, shabby in that gathering, came nervously forward.

“Oh, Mr.—er——” she faltered, “could I have a few words with you ? It's for my paper !”

“Heavens !” said Martin, looking wildly round.

“Propaganda. Publicity. Just what you want !” I prompted.

Martin at once grew business-like.

“It's for the ‘Fads and Fancies’ column in ‘The Earth,’ ” she said in a genteel and mincing voice, “Mrs. Arthur Carey sent a card to us.”

Was it cattishness on Madge's part—or just good nature? Good nature often goes with sheer indifference.

Martin laughed boyishly.

"What are you going to say?" he asked the girl.

"That's just it." She was almost tearful. "You see"—she tried to tell him—"there was nothing *new* at all, as you may say. Was there, Mr.—er —?"

"Lord, no!" said Martin sympathetically, "so you haven't anything to write about. I see. Will they be shirty? Can't we knock a par together somehow?"

"Oh, perhaps—if you could give me just a *name* or two?" She looked more hopeful.

"Name?"

"Yes. Of the people here. I suppose there are some *real* people?" She looked round at the vanishing throng with the shrewd appraisement of the Society reporter. "I don't see anyone one knows," she added discontentedly, "except Lady Stuart-Scott—and she goes everywhere." Her tone demolished the prestige of Madge's peeress.

Martin was puzzled.

"Oh, I know!" he said at last. He darted up to Madge. "Have you an invitation list?" he asked. "I mean the names of all the people who were asked to this?"

"Yes, if I haven't torn it up," said Madge.

He darted back. "Look here!" he said. "When does 'The Earth' come out?"

"On Thursdays."

"Well, this is only Friday. If I post a list to-night of all the people here, would that do? Tell me your name. I'll send it to you straight."

"Oh, thank you, Mr.——" She grew arch over the production of a printed visiting card from a sham silver bag. "I wish I'd thought to bring my umbrella," she said chattily, "it's pouring now, and it looked quite settled when I left."

"Where have you got to go to? Is it far?"

"It's Anerley Park." She blushed for it. But Anerley Park to country ears does not sound too indecently different from Hyde Park. Martin rushed to intercept the last few of the audience.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" he cried loudly, "but have any of you a car outside?"

There was a startled silence. Then soft laughter sounded, and a pretty show of small hands dressed in *suede* went up.

"Oh, good!" said Martin. "Wait a minute, if you *will* be so angelic!"

He dived back for the abashed young woman.

"Here is Miss Skinner," he announced, "she's left her umbrella behind and she lives in Anerley Park. I'm sure you'd like to give her a lift on your way home!"

On their way home—Anerley Park! I chuckled: the boy was quite past praying for.

Not a bit of it. There was a deathly pause. Then a stout woman with a good grey fringe smiled frankly in his face.

"As a practical application?" she asked softly.

"If you like," said Martin, smiling back.

A moment and Miss Skinner, trembling, climbed into a lordly car and was dropped at Anerley Park on Mrs. Carlyle's "way home" to Knightsbridge!

That decided me.

"Martin will get on," I said to Madge; "if he wants to move London, he needn't talk to people from a platform. He's only got to smile at women—one by one."

"You do make him sound fatuous," said Adela, off her guard, indignant.

"He can be as fatuous as he likes—not that I said he was! If he grows fat, that ends it, certainly." I was in the mood in which one stoops to feeble teasing. It gave me a none too sweet amusement to see the sheer dislike in Adela's glance at me. To do her justice, she was quite unconscious of the completeness of her cure, and doubtless believed herself still Héloïse to my reluctant Abélard.

A radiant vision glided forward from the "penitent bench." She was a sort of living protest against all that women have chosen lately to become—or to appear. You could not have imagined her in the harshness of khaki or the severity of stubbed *chevelure*. Softness and floating grace were her key-note. While every other woman wore short skirts she wore a

little silken train, held daintily as trains were held some fifteen years ago. Diaphanous veils floated from her hat. Airy curls fluttered from beneath it. Her eyes were tender blue, like river forget-me-nots. Her mouth was tender and pale pink, and drooped a little plaintively. Her voice was tender as the cooing of a dove of Paradise. She enveloped Martin like a zephyr.

“I don’t know how to thank you ! ” she murmured. “Perhaps you would come and see me, would you ? I could talk to *you*. How few there are that one can really *talk* to of the things that matter ! Will you come ? You could *help* me so ! ” Her veils and scarves all fluttered with a sigh. She sprayed a faint, expensive perfume on the air.

Martin was overwhelmed. He found himself involuntarily assuming the same expression of intense tenderness as the lady.

“I’d love to come,” he managed to get out.

We watched him, chuckling inwardly. Soft things were done with a golden pencil and an ivory tablet. Martin, half-hypnotized, stood watching his admirer as she floated to the door. When she had reached it she threw back her head over her graceful shoulder.

It was precisely the attitude of “The Gardener’s Daughter” and all the other masterpieces of my youth that used to stand in silver frames on occasional tables in every well-constituted drawing-room.

Martin, recovering, studied the card she had left with him,

"Her name is unexpectedly—robust!" he said. "'Mrs. John Rudge' is the last label Providence ought to have tied on to her. Who is she? And—I don't mean to be ungallant—but how old is she—about?"

"Exactly. You'd never guess," said Madge; "she's only twenty-eight, if that! That way of dressing is her stunt and always has been. Some one caught her very young, and persuaded her that when at Rome the great thing is to do as the Romans don't, and then you get more chance of standing out of the crowd. There's something in it. The style is pretty too, and really suits her. If we all took it up, I should be sorry for her, for tailor-mades and trimness would be very hard on her. I wonder if she could ever change her *voice*!"

"I went to see her once," said Adela, "in the old days. I'll never forget it!"

"What happened?"

"Oh, it was funny from start to finish! First of all, she'd invited me, so she presumably knew I was coming; but when I was announced she said '*You!*' in a low voice of rapturous astonishment. (You've heard Dusé say '*Armand!*' in the '*Dame aux Camélias*'?) Then she led me to a sofa and drew me softly down. It was quite a voluptuous moment! She began to stroke my hand, and say how she had longed for a talk alone like this. I understood—she could feel that I understood."

"And did you?"

"Not a cent!" Martin was listening, and Adela began to sparkle up.

"What did you say?"

"Oh, I made what H. G. Wells would call sympathetic noises. Then she told me that everything she touched invariably turned to tragedy. Sort of Mary, Queen of Scots stunt, I suppose."

"Has she a husband?" inquired Martin. "Or has he turned to tragedy? I suppose he 'doesn't understand her'?"

"On the contrary," said I, "I expect he probably does. That's at the root of most married women's tragedies!"

"Oh, come!" said Martin, guilelessly glancing at Madge. It had never occurred to Martin that Madge and I were not on terms of burning devotion, tempered only by my circumstances.

"You'll find it's true!"

"Don't suppose I shall," said Martin, "it isn't so easy to understand a woman."

"Oh, isn't it! In one sense it's a platitude that every human being is a locked room to every other. But that special Sphinx business attributed to women—I have never understood how it came about; unless it's an obstinate survival of the days of veils and harems. Women have lost no end in losing those."

"Yes," said Adela, "it would be gorgeous to be some one's chattel. Fancy your whole duty being to lie about on cushions and eat sweets. You've gone

and 'liberated' us, just so that we should work for you and save our keep!"

"How many hours' work have *you* done to-day, I should like to know?"

"Shopping at sales would be the highest paid of any trade if it weren't voluntary, but I'm thinking of the typists in the trams." She was obviously doing nothing of the sort. She was thinking that, in her good spirits and her graceful black and white, Martin must find her pleasing to the ear and eye.

"The typists in the trams are often full of beans," said Madge, who ran a club for the species in connexion with the cheaply ubiquitous Lady Scott-Stuart; "they wouldn't thank you to lay them down on cushions and feed them on Turkish Delight——"

"The only typist I ever employed adored Turkish Delight," I put in, interrupting.

"You can't think they *like* being typists, dear Madge!" said Adela. My wife and she seldom addressed one another without endearments.

"Nobody likes being anything all of the time," I suggested. "I take it that most of these girls would be 'helping at home' or serving in shops if they hadn't learnt typing and shorthand. And when they're of another class than that, they often type just to prove that they can type. It hardly seems worth proving; but half the womanly independence business is just a rather childish self-assertion. I sympathize. I never particularly wanted to give a baby a bath. But if I heard you constantly imply that there was something

about my sex that prevented me from ever achieving such a thing, I should probably not rest until I'd got that baby either clean or drowned. Of course we're drifting to the only logical course—and very depressing it is. We're going to ignore sex altogether and throw open every mortal avocation to women. Then those who can will succeed and those who can't will fail. We shall more or less lose sight of 'women' and only recognize *people*. And all that pretty specialized world of tinted mystery and airs and graces and Watteau fêtes and flirted fans, and silks and scents and sweet silliness will go—from the respectable crowd. The other crowd will score enormously—with all the rotters. But that's a barren crowd and hardly matters."

"Which are *we*?" asked Adela audaciously.

"You are the last fairies left on the lawn before the cold dawn breaks," I said, to please her. Adela could always keep happy on compliments, so why deny her them? They are such mighty small coin! It is strange that we should all so eagerly pick up what we ourselves so lightly throw away. I have known a woman whose husband spent her money, compromised her good name and was unfaithful to her. He never failed to make her pretty speeches: and she adored him all his life and broke her heart over his death.

"I don't think you'll do away with sex, even among your workers," said Martin sagely.

"Of course not; but it will have an obstacle race.

A working companionship is bound to lead to enmity or friendship—and friendship is a fatal bar to love."

"Oh, surely not—of the best kind!" Madge always had the obvious noble sentiment on tap.

"Well, say to passion, if you like. It's what nine out of ten people mean by love."

"What would you say the difference was?"

This came from Adela. She was always interested at certain word-*motifs*, "passion" being one.

"I should say that love—the marrying kind—was a silver vase with a rose in it. The rose dies . . ."

"And then we fling away the vase?"

"Precisely."

These are delicate topics when your hearers include your titular wife, and your ex-inamorata. Madge, ever tactful, felt the strain.

"Let's collect the roses," she suggested. "I thought I'd send them to my Hospital before they die." Madge applied the possessive pronoun to an amazing number of public buildings on the strength of one subscription or three visits.

Adela gathered a great handful from the nearest bowl.

"Oh, look!" she cried. "Did you ever see such colours?"

Holding them in her long white arms, she certainly was picturesque. I glanced at Martin: but he bent to smell them as she held them towards him, without the upward look into her eyes that a man gives in such circumstances when he is attracted. She looked down at him . . .

What beasts we are ! How, when we feel no honest jealousy, no wish to hold and keep a woman for our own, dare we indulge in cold disgust when she shows passion for another man ? I told myself that it was all for Martin's sake—disgusting, a mere boy !—but all the time I knew my heart and vanity were sore. My sensitive chair had made me doubly sensitive. Adela was perhaps not capable of love. Fewer of us are capable of love than we like to think. She had the mixture of sentiment and desire that passes current everywhere. If she had shown me real love, after I hurt my spine, I think I should have loved her. It would have kept me from my best happiness and kept her from risking disaster. I think she never saw me while she lived. She saw dear Arthur, who appreciated Adelas when Henries didn't : and poor Arthur, who made Adelas look like graceful ministering angels. Of an Arthur objectively existent in a world devoid of Adelas she was simply and entirely unconscious.

I was honest in this—that I wished to save both of them from trouble. I could see that Martin was exceptionally unawakened ; quite evidently, in any case, he took "Cousin Adela" on the plane of an aunt, youngish, comely, but not of his own generation. Still, it has happened not once but a thousand times over that a woman of her age, once roused, has affected a youngster—perhaps all the more because his defences are down. A girl is the sweet enemy at sight. A woman who has "mothered" you, and suddenly

turns girl, as women do when passion gives them that strange, pathetic, softening glow—she may turn out a danger.

I thought of Martin first, as most would think of him ; but it was Adela, not he, who stood to lose in the long run. Whether she married him or corrupted him (an ugly word, but that was what it came to, after all), it spelt disaster for her. I did not think him fool enough to marry her deliberately or think her knave and fool enough to try to marry him ; but he might well be trapped by the insidious “ honour ” trap : and she—I knew too well how she could get her way, whether one loved her or showed her just the pity and the admiration that she earned.

Martin might be something of a prig and something of an ass. He was my old friend’s boy and Buffer’s brother. I resolved to speak to Adela.

Meanwhile I spoke to Martin. He was all dejection.

“ I might have known,” he said ; “ who am I to preach to people ! No wonder they didn’t care to listen. Truth would still be truth even if the cat talked it. That was my notion. I was a super-ass. I might have known.”

“ Dear me,” said I, “ I thought you’d made a hit. They purred, didn’t they ? ”

“ Oh, I dare say they purred. Most of them asked me to dinner. As if that was what——” He stopped, in evidently real mortification.

“ My dear Martin,” I said, “ may I be as offensive as people in spinal chairs are allowed to be ? ”

" You couldn't, dear old thing ! But you may try !"

" Well, this is how I make it out. You were prepared for stones and persecutions. Nobody cares enough about Christianity to-day to persecute it. Christ would be asked to dinner everywhere in London. You see a vision. The other people see—or think they see—what has been shown them all their lives. You can't give them new eyes. They see a nice boy giving a pi-jaw. If you could talk to them of spooks or face-creams or hypnotism or some newer crank belief you'd be the rage, and get no end of followers. As it is, the unthinking fancy they have accepted Christianity long ago, and the few who think know that they cannot accept it and live for a week as they are living. They *know* that the two things can't be squared. They may abstain from crimes and have no special vices ; but if they have grasped what Christianity really is they know it would upset the apple-cart. It is inconvenient, impracticable, and rather rotten form. You'll have to take up politics instead. What used to be called 'Christian Socialism' is a paying line, I believe."

" I don't care if it's called politics," said Martin, " politics would be part of it if I could have my way. The trouble is, you have to have a party, haven't you ? "

" Yes, I suppose so. Haven't you a party ? Cambridge usually has. Besides, I heard a rumour of some remarkable debates at the Union, didn't I ? What side did you take then ? "

"Oh"—Martin blushed—"I used to take up any old side and defend it against the other. I've tried for ages to make up my mind which lot one ought to belong to. I read 'The New Statesman' and a Tory weekly once a week and the 'Daily News' and some Tory paper every day, to counteract each other and to see both sides. They all seemed rather to waste their time slanging each other (the 'N.S.' was much the best about that), but when they gave their programme it sounded excellent. Then when you came down to individuals they didn't live up to it : the Labour Party used to sound quite beautiful in all its aims—on paper. Then you met Labour *people*—and they were all just as grasping and as full of hate as anyone else. They've more excuse where we're concerned. We've had puddings and pies and they've had skilly. But they are beastly to each other where their interests clash. I don't know how one could take sides."

"You'd better start a sort of mendicant friar business and go about with a wooden bowl," I suggested, turning a little weary of Martin.

"I'd go about with a rocking-horse if they'd listen," Martin sighed.

"I know what I must do," he said at last, "just find the people with the fewest articles to sign—political or religious—who feel as I do : join them, and do as I'm told. I'd like, if possible, to work at a trade and live in the slums for a bit—not in a cosy Settlement of any kind—just cheek by jowl, so that there wouldn't be any ghastly 'kind gentleman' about it. What do you think ? "

"Excellent idea," I said. I thought I knew my young. They can safely as a rule cherish the wildest projects—till the next project dawns upon their restless minds.

Is it a gain, this growing out of wild-cat schemes? Would we elders, if we could, have again the ferment, all the unsatisfied desire, the age-old feeling which we fancied to be disillusion and was illusion all the time? Would we exchange for it our lethargy that we call peace, our indifference that we label "tolerance," our hopelessness that we mistake for philosophy? Of course we should! To wish for anything with ardour, and to fail to get it and wish for something else—what heaven beside the knowledge that is ours, that there is nothing in this world under the sun worth the breathing forth of an "If only . . .!"

## CHAPTER VII

**T**HAT same night Doady tackled Adela.

"Look here, my dear," she said, "what are you going to do about that boy?"

"Oh, think out another line for him to proselytize along, I suppose!" Adela managed to convey the impression of a yawn.

"Addie, be square with me! You always are."

Adela faced her little dumpy mentor with cheeks that burned—her fine, rich brunette flush, so far more beautiful than the shrimp-pink of blondes, often most evident in their foreheads.

"Are you going to leave him alone?" asked Doady bluntly.

"No!"

"I thought not!"

Adela began an agitated striding of the room.

"Good God!" she burst out suddenly.

Doady settled herself in her chair. When Adela began with "Good God!" it was always a goodish time before you got a word in.

"It's damnable! One would think an irresistible emotion was a crime! As if half our lives weren't spent without one, working up half-hearted feelings,

just in hopes of one true thrill ! Doady ! it's all very well for you. You have that blessed even temperament. You're happy as you are. You've always been. It's not your merit. It's your luck—or your deficiency. If there had been a shade of difference in your blood, or your heredity or whatever it is, you would have felt like me. The difference is that you'd have been ashamed of it. Ashamed ! I'm proud. . . . Good God, are there so many real things about, *strong* things ? I wouldn't change with any whity-brown, anæmic 'purities'—not as I feel now—to save my soul ! Why, I am young again—I'm like a girl ! Only that no girl could feel as fiercely. Doady ! Why is it sensitive and fine to love beautiful music and beautiful landscapes and delicate fruit and exquisite painting, and coarse and horrible to love the body of Adonis when God sends it into this hideous world—this vulgar crowd ? Adonis, Adonis. . . . " Her voice died down. Her friend sat silent.

" I could be his Venus—not so lovely, not so crude, though ! Doady, think ! if I had been a man, and seen a girl as beautiful as Martin, and only that much younger than myself—would anyone have thought me hateful and ridiculous ? Why, if I had even married her, no one would have cried 'Shame !' And I don't want to marry Martin and tie him down to my old age when it comes ! I only want to have one joyous moment in my drab, strained life. It wouldn't hurt him. I would make it sweet. It would be a flame to him that didn't leave a scorch. Why ? *Why ?*"

She twisted a long strand of her dark hair round each white wrist and tugged.

Doady found herself wondering. "Is that 'tearing her hair'? *Do* people tear their hair, then, outside books?" She reproached herself for heartlessness.

"What about Arthur, then?" she asked.

Adela stopped as if a wet sponge had been thrown at her.

"Arthur," she said in a different, toneless voice. She sat down, staring blankly.

"I know what it must seem to you," she said at last, "you've gone through enough listening to my maunderings about Arthur. Of course. That discounts everything."

"It does a bit, you know!" said Doady gently.

"Yes. Two *grandes passions* are not supposed to be poetic, I know. Still . . . Doady!"

"Yes?"

"Supposing one of them had never been spontaneous? Can you imagine yourself another person for two minutes? Will you try?"

"Go ahead."

"Well, then, you're Adela. You've married on tepid affection. You weren't consciously a snob—not more than other people, anyway—but when your friends were marrying solicitors and doctors and people in the City and thought you something wonderful for fascinating a Marquess's son. . . . And when he seemed quite kind and rather interesting. . . . And when he grew into a mean, cold, cruel tyrant, never

brutal, like a real man, but fighting you with little pointed bits of ice. . . . Oh, yes, I know he's dead, thank God ! It's rot about the dead. Far better to be gentle to the living. Henry got what he wanted. He wanted me. Just as I want that boy. He wanted me for my smooth skin and my fine eyes and silky hair and graceful way of moving. I was fifteen years younger, just as Martin is. Every one thought it rather good of him to chain me to him for his lifetime, even though he hardly gave me enough warmth to toast a crust at after the first year. So far, you're with me, Doady, aren't you ? You knew Henry."

" I never held much of a brief for Lord Henry that I know of. The fact remains that if he broke his word to 'cherish' you, you broke your word to keep you only unto him. Every one sympathized until the Arthur episode."

" I know. I know. Henry was my poison-gas. Arthur was just my gas-mask—at the start. I only liked his sympathetic manners. I could feel he didn't really love me. Every woman knows at once, whatever novels say. That's where I went so wrong. I worked it up. I didn't feel an overmastering passion for him, and I knew he never did for me. But I shut my eyes to that. I thought that he *must* love me sooner or later. And I desperately wanted to love *something*—fiercely. I'd never had one single authentic violent emotion in my life, except for girls at school, and mistresses, and once a Persian kitten. It was killed. Why does God put those longings into women,

if they're to fold their hands and wait for men—and then get Henries for their pains ? ”

“ What beats me is all this violence,” said Doady, “ if I had been a good-looking woman like you, and had the bad judgment to take Henry Curtis for a normal human man, I think I should have made the best of things while he lived ; and if I had had the luck to be his widow at your age, and still felt enterprising, I’d have made myself look pretty and waited for the real man again. If you’d run straight you could be married now in your old set. What’s wrong with a man because he’s a doctor or a parson ? (I cannot see that you get anything beyond the picturesqueness of a title, which certainly sets off your style of looks !) ‘ Instead of which ’ you first go off the rails. Then you tell every second friend you have, including your old set, that there’s going to be a divorce. Then, when you have the really marvellous luck to get out of that, and rid of your horrid Henry and just begin to live the whole thing down, what must you do but risk everything all over again for a boy young enough, almost, to be your son, who looks upon you as a sort of pleasant aunt ! ’ ”

“ Oh, your merciless good sense ! ” Adela shivered. “ You’re not being me. You’re only being Doady, with my circumstances. I might have known ! ”

“ Well, even now, it’s not too late. Remember how infatuations end. Pull yourself together, send this child away, shut up the flat and travel with me. We

can afford a decent *pension* somewhere. You could make fresh friends."

"A row of women knitting grey wool sports coats with pink edges! Doady, thou canst not minister to a mind diseased."

"Glad you acknowledge the disease!"

"But I don't! Not really. I believe there's a good deal of sound biology in that Life Force stunt. Expect Nature meant me—means me still—to be the mother of 'radiant sons and beautiful daughters.' She cares nothing for one's birth certificate or marriage certificate. She only wants the good red blood."

"My good red blood is wearying for bed," said Doady, yawning. "I've listened to you. Go and sleep, for goodness' sake!"

"Poor old Doady!" Adela knelt by her and leant her head against the sturdy shoulder. "Doady, Doady, Doady!" she said heart-brokenly.

The old maid at once became a mother.

"There, there, there," she crooned, patting the graceful head.

More comforted than by an hour of reasoning, Adela clung a moment. Then she went to bed. Doady had done her best. At the back of all her real pain, the woman who had had a husband and a lover heard herself say "Poor Doady!"

Then I, too, tried my hand, and was badly worsted. Adela's eyes danced as they had danced when I first began my unfortunate campaign of consolatory flattery of the neglected wife of Henry Curtis. It is a parti-

cularly invidious thing to advise your ex-mistress against losing her heart to another man. Nothing on God's earth will persuade her that you are not actuated by the most gratifying jealousy—and the plague is that you *are*, be she as stale to you as the design on your study wall-paper.

Adela, irritatingly, showed herself more fascinating, more of the born *charmeuse*, as the naughty object of my fatherly advice than she had ever been as the wistful candidate for my wretched affections. She had a little sparkling air, a smile that was not allowed to touch the demure mouth but implied itself somewhere behind the eyes. She humoured me. I felt a fool: an angry fool. Why the pest cannot women sing their "Hey! Nonny, Nonny" *before* possession, and prolong the thrill? Why wait until they hardly care if you be thrilled or not? Why weary you with plaintive monotones while they still desire you, and then, too late, become provocative, adorable? An invalid in a spinal chair is an unfair victim, anyway. I hated Adela: and, for the first time, felt I could have loved her, shallowness and all. I have yet to meet the man whose love has been won by merit or devotion, or alienated by petty unkindnesses. Roughly speaking, it is perfectly safe, once having secured a lover, to treat him like a dog. Reverse the spelling and treat him like a god, and gratified vanity may hold him, but desire will fail. You may burn joss-sticks and he will willingly inhale the odour, but he will not catch fire. The next young madam who

may flout him will make him affix the adjective "poor" to you in all his thoughts: once "poor dear So-and-So," and you are lost.

Adela, then, stood softly mocking me, and taking my delicate admonitions for the expression of my pangs. I resorted to coarseness.

"You're hardly the age for cradle-snatching, are you? If you are, you are at some pains to conceal it!"

"My hair hasn't even turned auburn yet, has it?" said she.

It had not. It gleamed like anthracite.

"Perhaps it is the pious stage that comes on apace."

"You know the three degrees?" she asked.

"*Coquette*; *cocotte*; *dévote*?"

I winced at the "cocotte" and she laughed wickedly.

"What is the definition?" she inquired. "One who takes pelf in return for loving-kindness? Well?" . . .

I was going to make a rejoinder of disgust, but checked myself. I saw her drift. She was diverting me from the main issue.

I faced her steadily, and smiled in silence. That, in the old days, never failed to daunt her, and elicit floods of speech. She now smiled back serenely.

"Shocking!" she said. "That dreadful Lady Henry, and that poor, dear boy. His Uncle Arthur must write to his nice 'people.' "

"It's a cheap game, Adela."

"Oh, no, it's not ! It's worth a mort of candles, Arthur."

"There's something comic in *my* preaching—well I know it ! But I'll trade on my infirmities and preach—or rather warn. This will end in disgust on his side and in pain on yours. If I know anything at all I'm sure of that."

"Well ? I've borne both those things before—with less incentive."

I winced at that.

Adela is tender-hearted at her very worst. My silence smote her.

"Arthur," she said, sincere at last, and kneeling by me, "if you had ever cared for me, I might have felt the same as I do now, but I swear I should have fought it. Anyway I'd not have hurt you."

"You are hurting me now."

"Too late, my dear. For seven years I tried to hurt you. *Don't* tell me that I can at last." The dramatic note I hated crept back into her voice.

"You do not hurt my feelings but my conscience," I told her, with at least some truth, "here I have broken up your life a good bit (though I own you helped in that—let us have truth, even if it has a caddish sound). I hoped that now things would come right. If you go off the rails again, can't you imagine how I should feel that I had given the first push ? To see you respected would be one of the few alleviations of my not too hilarious life." To save her I was quite willing to trade on my infirmities.

Adela looked touched ; but what are words opposed to passions ?

" You seem to think I mean to throw Martin across my saddle-bow," she said. " I assure you I don't—even if he'd come."

" That's one comfort," I said brutally.

Of course it was all no good. I might have spared my breath. I would have spared it if what " subsequently transpired," as a journalist would say, had been ever so faintly imagined by me. Of all young Martin's developments, his treatment of this situation has amazed me most.

I learned about it afterwards, from Doady and from Adela—reluctantly from him. Piecing all evidence together, this is what took place.

Adela waited for her chance.

While she waited, she was like a girl of twenty, on the brink of her first love-affair. Maurice Hewlett said the very truth when he pronounced that every woman turns virgin when she loves. It is as though the senses did not wait for the body's slow renewal of its tissues every seven years, but bounded to a complete renaissance—so that no man is inconstant, being, as it were, another man—a dangerous doctrine.

Adela, then, in her strange flowering, agitated her surroundings. Madge went stolidly along taking notice in her queer, cold way, and commenting to me, with a not unnatural pleasure. It would have been the subtlest revenge if I had ever loved Adela. As it was, the pricks were pin-pricks and not dagger-thrusts.

To do her justice, Madge would have shrunk from all that pertains to daggers. She always considered the more violent aspect of life a deplorable vulgarity.

Matters came to a climax on an evening of music. The boy had sung, absurdly like an angel chorister of fiction, if you substitute light tenor for soprano. He had the white brow and the shining eyes, the whole outfit, in fact, as he, with fierce resentment, knew. The one thing that consoled him was that it was "useful" to his cause. There was a fine streak of humorous irony about the saintliness of Martin. That I knew. What I was not prepared for was his staggering common sense.

Adela watched him as he sang, till all of us were writhing inwardly. It is indecent to see emotions writ so large on any human face. Hers was a lovely face that night, for all its naked hunger. There was an apricot-like bloom upon its delicate haggardness ; the great eyes burned superbly. When she said good night to me, I had a twinge of premonition.

That night, when all of us were sleeping, Martin felt a light touch on his forehead.

He started up. There, by his bed, stood Adela, her long hair streaming over a golden kimono.

"Don't wake the house," she whispered, "but come into my room a moment. There are such queer sounds. . . . I can't see anything."

Martin, of course, suspected nothing. He threw on a dressing-gown and followed her, barefooted, to her room.

The "sounds" had (naturally) ceased; but while he listened and she seemed to listen, Adela drew near the boy and clung to him. He put an arm mechanically round her, believing her really frightened.

"Oh, Martin!" she sighed. Drawing down his head to hers, she kissed him passionately.

Martin was amazed, I understand. He made a quick recovery, however. He administered a bear's hug to his handsome cousin, returning her kiss with interest more than once.

"You angel!" he said. "You knew I was a bit disgruntled, and you thought you'd comfort me. I shall never forget the brick you've been, to my dying day. You're as kind as you're beautiful!"

"Am I beautiful, Martin?"

"I should just think you *are*, in that long yellow thing, with all your ripping hair down! Now I must git. Mind you call me again if you hear anything!" And with another schoolboy hug, he fled. Resistance inflames the passions, but affection baffles them. Adela let him go. The subtlest of diplomats could not have saved a situation—and a woman's feelings—better.

Long afterwards I sounded him, first convincing him that I knew everything. He was at first extraordinarily hard to "draw."

"She wasn't altogether being *Mater Consolatrix*, you know," I suggested.

"Oh, no!" said Martin, "it was much more fun than that!"

"Oh, so you did understand! I should have thought you'd have been shocked—the boy you were then."

"Good Lord!" said Martin. "Where does the harm come in? A pretty woman is good enough to—let you kiss her, and you do so, and say 'thank you.' It isn't as if she'd had a husband, or as if I'd had a wife. I *had* to put the 'unconscious' stop on—*that* made me feel prig enough!—or there might have been—complications. But now to have you expecting me to shrink in holy horror from a thing like that—what do you take me for! The only thing was not to hurt her—and I don't think she was hurt. *I* wasn't!"

Fortune favours some of us to the extent of saving us even the embarrassment of a "situation." Meeting Martin at breakfast on the morning after her midnight escapade might well have been a *gêne* to Adela; but Martin was absorbed in a recall to his home.

"My godfather is coming to stay," he exclaimed, after opening a letter from his mother, "he's going to hold a Confirmation at our town. He generally stays at the Rectory, but it's got measles—at least the kiddies have—so we're to have the honour. He's a dear old boy."

"I didn't know you had a Bishop in the family," said Adela, "that accounts for much."

"Well, it doesn't, for he isn't in our family. He was at Charterhouse with Father and they've kept up with one another all these years. If he didn't happen

to be our Bishop I don't suppose they would have, really ; but Father takes great credit to himself, ' You don't find these lasting friendships now, my boy,' and so forth. Bless him ! ”

“ Is the Bishop married ? ”

“ He *was* the husband of one wife. Now he's the widower of the same one. He has one fair daughter, who keeps house for him.”

“ Your godsister. Is she really ‘ fair ’ ? ”

“ I've never seen her ; but I've had it dinned into me most of my life that she's a paragon. We should probably detest each other if we met.”

“ Why haven't you ? ”

“ What—met each other ? It's always fallen through. She's been at school or staying away or having mumps or something each time I've been to the Palace. This time, I believe, she's really to be there.”

“ This time ? She's coming with her father, then ? ”

“ Oh, no ! I didn't tell you—he wants me to go back with him and spend a fortnight.”

“ Well, you're going to, I suppose ? ”

Adela's tone was almost too encouraging and cheerful.

“ Oh, I expect so.” Martin was evidently neither thrilled nor dismayed at the idea.

“ We are off as well,” said Adela, “ to Switzerland.”

Doady looked up sharply.

"Yes. To Mürren. The Wengernalp has been too long without me. I've heard it calling for some weeks now."

"What sort of voice does an Alp have, I wonder?"

"Oh, fresh and cold and sweet—a sort of Ice Maiden's siren-song."

"A cooling melody," I suggested, but Adela ignored me.

So closed the Adela and Martin episode. Not even a storm in a tea-cup—say, a ripple on a lake; for there were depths, though both escaped them—and we elders, Doady and I, felt fools for the pains we had been at, in watching over so astute a duckling as young Martin.

A characteristic letter from Doady came a few days later. It cheered me, for I had felt a twinge of heart-ache for poor Adela, so perpetually baulked of every joy.

"Our Dark Lady," she wrote, "is not wearing the willow. Just at first the mountains were trying—sunsets and all that sort of thing—and there was a good deal of poetry spouted, and she wore her long jet earrings, always a sign of chastening, poor dear girl. Then she grew to be the fashion at our *pension*; and now she regularly moves about with a comet-tail behind her, carrying her dingle-dangles. There's a Colonel, rather tight and red. He and I appear to be the only people in the place to wear a corset. There's

a curate, very tall and thin, with a weak back and glasses, who talks on risky subjects in very manly slang, to show that his cloth needn't protect him too much. Then there's a frightfully gentlemanly young man. I think he must have been born in a shop, he's so carefully *distingué*. Adela rather cottoned to him ; but he spoke of his 'serviette' yesterday, and—much worse—apologized for it afterwards. There are one or two nondescripts who have a timid air of expecting their wives shortly. All these are in Addie's train. All the rest are women—fat women, brawny women, lean women, tawny women. Every woman knits a jumper and plays patience. They don't disapprove of Adela. They love her. They think they're seeing Life in its strong, lurid aspect. The Smart Set is an open book to them, now that they've watched Addie smoke. They 'Lady Henry' her all day. She loves them—snuffs it up. Some of them call her 'Lady Curtis,' and this is an exquisite, pitying amusement to the others, bless them ! 'My father would turn in his grave if he had heard Lady Henry called Lady Curtis,' one of the dear souls told me yesterday. The poor old gentleman must be too loosely packed.

" You see how right I was to come to this sort of *pension*. If we had gone to the hotels you generously wanted, Addie would have been no one, and had heaps of time to moon about and think of Martin. Or she would have met some former friends who might have been chilly to her. Here she is a queen ; and if ever there was a woman on this earth who was naturally

meant to be petted and fêted, it's Addie. If she had been content to be first in a village, and married among her own nice middle-class set, there would have been none of these tears. However, Providence chose to make her with the face and figure of a tragedy princess, so It's responsible. I cannot picture her as Mrs. Thompson, which is what so many genuine princesses look like. It's a funny world. But, anyhow, she's almost happy for the moment. So am I."

Good Doady ! Dumpy little aristocrat with a brain and heart of gold, and no living man with eyes to see them through the unromantic flesh that was their envelope, and to worship her as she deserved. I myself, who did appreciate her—would I have taken all the fatal trouble that I took to cheer up Henry Curtis's wife if she had looked like Doady ? In Paradise she shall have a figure and a face to match her soul, and Doady will make her first sensation. Pending that fleshless *début*, she will never play lead in any human drama.

And now I will wheel myself out of the centre of the stage, to which a spinal chair is hardly an exhilarating ornament. Where the lives of Martin and the rest touch mine I will appear again, supine in proper person. For the details of their story I depend upon a word here, a hint there, as the naturalist constructs the ichthysaurus—and upon my knowledge of their souls. When your alternative contemplation is confined to ceilings, you are apt to concentrate upon the souls around you.

Your resulting perspicacity is a sorry recompense—  
but still a recompense.

Henceforward, till you see the door thrown open  
for my chair, forget me.

## CHAPTER VIII

“ **H**OW old is he ? ”

Ask this question of the callow young, and you will get for an answer :

“ Oh, I don’t know—thirty or forty. He may be fifty—I’ve never thought.” The three decades are all one to twenty-something’s eyes—negligibly venerable.

Martin had been as vague as his contemporaries on the subject of his godfather’s age, if he had thought of it at all. When he met the Bishop this time, he was startled. It is possible that Adela had something to do with it. Doady was right in her cruelty when she said that, up to the night of the “ temptation,” Martin had looked on Adela as a pleasant aunt. Contact with her magnetic passion changed his outlook slightly. People of another generation could apparently be of like passions with oneself. He did not reason consciously that this was so ; but it coloured his impressions from that day. He found himself wondering at the undamaged contour of his mother’s chin and throat ; and the amazing youth of his godfather was a revelation to him.

Bishop Browne had not the air of an old man who looks young, but rather of a young man who looks old.

His lean face, ardent eyes, quick movements and springy step were all as unlike the aproned corpulence of the stage-and-fiction Bishop as can be conceived. His had been a life of sharp emotions ; and sharp emotions line the face but do not age the personality. It is a curious fact that domesticity and peace preserve to men a surface freshness that is helpless to counteract the obesity, so to speak, of the spirit that almost always accompanies them. Adela and Martin's mother were not wide apart in age, and his mother's face was practically unworn, while Adela's was ravaged ; but no man of the world would have doubted which woman's veins held the heats of youth. As sunshine puts out a fire, domestic happiness extinguishes the passions ; and passion, generous, holy or merely sensual, is surely the very stuff of youth.

The Bishop had had a mighty struggle in his early days. He had fought with poverty. He had seen a young wife die, after two years of fierily happy marriage. Then, being of the Church Militant that finds its zeal inflamed by persecution, he had fought Rector, Vicar and Bishop after Rector, Vicar and Bishop on the subject of "ritualistic practices." When no other church "reserved," there was Reservation at this church. While the word "Mass" was still anathema, Mass was celebrated there. While the eastward position in itself was still debatable, Bishop Browne had got as far as Benediction. This last brought down upon him vials of such pious vitriol from both Evangelicals and

the "Romans" whom his party secretly admired and envied, that he drew in his venturesome horns and compromised on a Novena. As nobody in the village knew what a Novena was, there was no protest. The local gentry were languidly amused and liked their handsome cleric, who at least afforded gossip by his scandals, chaste enough not to revolt the proper, and outrageous enough to turn church-going from a dreary duty to a fearful joy. The younger women flocked to his confessional; the younger men carried his candles in procession and waxed learned over Vespers of Our Lady.

Now all was altered. Ritualism had become respectable—the first step towards becoming boring. The Bishop had lost interest in it himself. When no one cares if you go out into the street with banners and birettas, half the thrill of going out is gone. His very genuine religion was still there; and now that he had the time to look at it, to take it out and test its watertightness, so to speak, the task had induced in him many conflicting sensations. More and more he found it hard to sympathize appropriately with his own disciples. The novice is fatiguing in his zest, and often finds the adept chilling. Only a week before his visit, the poor Bishop had had to conduct a little ceremony of thanks. A highly enthusiastic youth of his acquaintance, with more money than brain, had presented the Palace oratory with a statue of Our Lady. Blue-cloaked and veiled, white-robed, pink-cheeked and carmine-lipped and smirking, the deplorable figure

with the lilies in its arms and a decorous-looking serpent draped round the plaster feet, on a blue star-studded ground, had seemed to him unutterably out of place in its severely Anglican surroundings. In a garish little wayside chapel on some foreign road that ran between two lines of poplars, it would have appealed to many simple hearts. Marigolds in tin vases would have died at its feet. Cheap rosaries would have tinkled under its immutable smile. It would have stood for the anchor of life, the succour in distress, *Mater Misericordiæ*. Here, it simply jarred among stately oak and brass and delicate old glass. The Bishop groaned in secret.

“Isn’t it *wonderful*,” the donor gushed, “to think that She is here, in an English Bishop’s palace? Think what poor Goring would have thought!”

Now, our Bishop, along slightly different lines, was doing precisely that. He was thinking what poor Goring would probably have thought—that old wine goes badly in new bottles, and that crudely coloured plaster is an eyesore, anyway! But the supporter was so ardent, had so vivid a remembrance of the Bishop’s earlier tradition and his “noble fight,” that one had no heart to snub him. The tasteless travesty of the loveliest figure of the ages was accepted and installed, and a special service held to inaugurate its desecration of what had been, before its advent, at any rate a harmony to the eye, if not the soul.

Martin, perpetually curious as to all that touched

the lasting things, soon found himself immersed in Bishop Browne's perplexities.

"You found those things essential, sir? You risked a lot for them, I know."

"I did. I found the principle they stood for quite essential. So I still do. Whether it's served by trying to turn a Protestant Church with a secular head into a pseudo-Catholic one with no head at all——" The Bishop sighed.

"You think the Reformation an unmixed evil, I suppose?"

"I think there was plenty of room for reform. There was bound to be reform. What I do think is that England threw away the baby with the bath water, and that my set have been cooing round the empty bath too long."

"What was the baby? Not observances and ceremonies, surely?"

"No. Have you seen an Anglican congregation bobbing to the Real Absence, as Mallock called it? They have broken a link in the most delicately mystic chain that heaven ever wove, and begun weaving fresh links on to the broken end till they lose sight of the true chain."

"Well, why isn't the second chain as good as the first?"

"Supposing it were—it hangs in mid-air. Catholics believe that the first is held in the hand of God himself."

"Authority is what is missing, do you think?"

"Of course I do."

“Then——”

“What do you feel about it?” asked the Bishop quickly. He had an air of excitement that faintly surprised Martin. The argument was surely too hoary to account for it.

“I? I have the most utterly illogical position when it’s put into words. I feel ashamed of it each time I try to. People stump me with their sensible answers; then directly we’ve stopped talking, ‘Click’ it all goes back and I’m serene and happy and illogical again.”

“Could you tell me, do you think?”

“Wouldn’t it bore you? It’ll be like Cardinal Newman listening to a Sunday School kid’s brilliant ideas.”

“Newman? Cardinal Newman? Why do you mention him?” The Bishop was certainly in a mysterious state of agitation.

Martin looked up surprised.

“Oh, I don’t know! You look like him, for one thing. I was thinking so last night.”

“Oh!” The Bishop looked hard at him. His deep-set eyes were brilliant as a girl’s. “Tell me where you stand. I am enormously interested,” he said, recovering.

Martin frowned and hesitated.

“Well,” he began laboriously, “when it comes to belief, on the intellectual plane, I can’t honestly say I ‘believe’ anything whatever.”

“Oh, come! You believe in one God, don’t you?”

"Not necessarily more than in thirteen goddesses, no."

The Bishop forgot his mysterious undercurrent and sat up straight.

"I mean, numbers are nothing—Three in One and One in Three. None of all that intellectually. I don't *begin* to believe the story of it all—I can't. One Being creating two others, being powerless to prevent their falling into 'sin,' and when they do, not being able to forgive them until His only begotten Son has been tortured to death to satisfy His blood lust—it all seems such an incredible conception to me, Virgin Birth and all, that I can't imagine an Ojibbeway Indian believing it—intellectually. And what does 'begotten not created' mean? And the 'resurrection of the *body*'? All these things used to seem quite ordinary to me while I wasn't interested and just heard them every Sunday. As soon as I began to feel that the whole thing was either nonsense or *the* thing that mattered most, and tried to understand them, I found that trying to 'believe' them intellectually killed them as dead as you'd kill a flower by dissecting it!"

"But you recognize the flower. That is something."

"I think I would die for the flower."

"Then can't you just accept it? No need to botanize."

"One doesn't want to. But you are constantly made to. Look at any one who joins the Roman Church! 'Do you mean to say you *believe* this and

*believe that !* ' is all that anybody asks them—as if that was all there is to it ! "

" Yes ! " cried the Bishop. " Yes ! Are you drawn to the Roman Church ? "

At any other time, Martin would have noticed the emphasis. It would have told him much. Now he let it pass, still wrestling with the eternal task, the groping soul's hard task of telling, through the stuttering medium of the bodily tongue, where it really stands—or creeps.

" Yes, I'm drawn to it. I love it as I love the sea. It is like a patch of lovely tapestry on a vulgar garment, Catholic worship in a land like modern England. It calmly assumes incredible things and simply ignores what most men think important. I went, just the other day, to a funny little church where they ' processed ' round some cloisters. Cousin Adela's grocer was in the procession. He's a fat, cute little man, very keen at a bargain, and respectable and conventional ! And he had his hat all crooked, and he was holding on to an absurd candle that dripped all down his nice Sunday trousers, and he was bawling at the top of his voice. They were singing the Loretto, and he sang with the priest as well as with the people. '*Rosa mystica, ora pro nobis !*' '*Turris eburnea, ora pro nobis !*' It was amazing and I loved him. Would anything else but the Catholic Church make a fat little smug of a tradesman forget himself like that, and invoke the Mystic Rose and the Tower of Ivory out of doors with passers-by listening ? It was great."

"Yes," said the Bishop, "yes. And if you feel like that . . . "

"I love the Quakers too," Martin went on. "The whole idea of the quietness, the *listening*. The world is always talking, talking. No one listens for the still small voice that may be behind it all. I went to a Quakers' Meeting near our own place once. It was just like that Stevenson :

'Where the old, plain men have rosy faces,  
And the young, fair maidens quiet eyes.' "

"They have their points," the Bishop said, "but there is room for them inside the Church. Contemplatives . . . "

"Then there's the Salvation Army—isn't it gorgeous?" Martin plunged along, like a mill-race released. "Have you read 'General Booth's Entry Into Heaven'?"

"No," the poor Bishop said.

"I'd like to march with them, and play the drum and lead the people Home! A mighty sound of shouting—a kind of orgy of triumphant love! Bang! Follow the drum to glory! Fall in for the Great Adventure! Leave the haggling markets and the smirking drawing-rooms and the squalid offices, and shout to the glory of God!"

"That again, on your own showing, you get in the Catholic Church—but refined by ages of beautiful tradition and the interpretation of cultivated minds."

"Why, yes, it's one, of course"—Martin was still

obtuse—"but it has its own appeal. We all have something violent and blatant in us—call it vulgar, if you like. The Salvation Army tears that out, and holds it up for the sky to see. *Everything* shall serve Him—everything."

"Whom do you mean by 'Him'?"

Martin collapsed.

"Why, there it is!" he said. "I felt He was there, one and indivisible, seated above the Seraphim—till you said that. Must we always come to definitions and to numbers?"

"Well, it's a pretty nebulous faith that has no foundations, isn't it?"

"I don't know. Aren't the best things what you call 'nebulous'? You couldn't convince my *reason* of the difference between the *Liebestod* music and a barrel-organ. A lover couldn't bring any cut-and-dried facts to show why another woman with the same endowments won't do for him as well as his beloved. Supposing Heaven speaks to me in a cloud and to you in an equation—why not? If defining it is going to spoil it for me, why should I define it? Directly I do, It grows fantastic nonsense. As soon as I stop, I'm talking to It and trusting to It like a kid with its mother. Perhaps that's 'becoming as little children'? Let us hope so! If it's all wrong, then I'm wrong; but I can't help it."

"You go by the emotions, then?"

"That always makes one sound a sort of hysterical female. Perhaps I do. I don't know. These labels

—‘emotions’ and so on—seem to me the ruin of everything. I wish there were not so many names for things. We are all much simpler than our vocabulary. Words have acquired a sort of association that prejudices us; and, after all, they are only sounds that we make with our mouths! Certain words hypnotize us. Take ‘rest’ and ‘peace,’ for instance. Nearly every one is ready to cry when they hear them. You’ll see young people in a country church, perishing of stagnation, especially the girls. Then a hymn comes, all about longing for ‘peace’ and ‘rest,’ and you can almost *hear* them yearning; and all the time what they’re chafing for is excitement. People don’t often own to longing for excitement, except obliquely. They ask about a book ‘Is it exciting?’ and they say about a play ‘You *must* see it: it’s awfully exciting.’ But if you had a hymn, ‘O Paradise! O Paradise! Who does not long for a little excitement?’ they’d be ashamed to sing it—quite apart from its not scanning!”

“We’ve got a long way from where we started,” the Bishop said, smiling.

“I know. Why shouldn’t we? Unless I’m boring you?”

“No.”

“Sure? You make me feel as if I wanted to bring out every chaotic thought I ever had. It’s an awful prospect for you. It’s because you’re so vital and so sympathetic and so—young.”

“I believe age and youth are very largely ‘words,’ ”

the Bishop said, "very few people are entirely young or entirely old, at any stage of their lives. Boys and girls run through tracts, occasionally, of thought, or experience, that some of their elders haven't got to yet. Every one is young and old in different patches. It's pretty certain that the skin will get some lines on it as years go on ; but the mental wrinkles come at any age—or never. And even physical vitality may be low in a young person and so fierce in a much older one that, if they changed skins, they'd exchange ages."

"Age is skin-deep, like beauty ? "

"Sometimes. Of course, some neatly balanced people go through everything in its proper order. At fifty their opinions are just ten years more set, and their sight ten years weaker, and their ears ten years deafer, and their passions ten years colder, than at forty. There are others who not only are physically keen, but are passing through the undergraduate stage of spiritual ferment, for instance, at, say, *my* age." The Bishop glanced at Martin quickly.

Martin looked back at him. The look held, and deepened into a question.

"Well ? " said the Bishop gently. There was a sweet and shamefaced smile upon his face that was extraordinarily intimate and touching.

"Do you care to tell me ? " asked Martin equally softly.

"Yes. You would have to know soon, in any

case ; and I want you to know before the world does.  
Have you suspected nothing ? "

" No."

" I am to be received into the Church of Rome this summer."

## CHAPTER IX

MARTIN gasped. The two gazed at each other. Then each gave the sheepish half-smile that is the sign of relaxing tension in nine human beings out of ten, and turns all our finest effects to derision.

"That'll mean rather a lot to you, won't it?"

"Oh, everything, of course! But what am I to do?"

"By Jove!" said Martin. "This will be a haul for them! A son of an Archbishop of Canterbury has been a big enough fish, but an actual pukka Bishop out of a Palace!"

"You may well say 'out of'!"

"Yes. What do you think of doing, if I'm not——"

"I'm going to enter a religious Order, if they find I have a vocation for one. If not, I hope to be a secular priest—perhaps a missionary. My varied gift of tongues might come in handy."

Martin was dumb. There was a silence.

"Well?" said his godfather. His smile this time was almost roguish. "Do you think me a fool or a fanatic?"

"I like fanatics, and I know you're not a fool. I was trying to count the cost a bit."

"The cost will be one thing only," said the Bishop, "the reducing of Shelley from a comfortable life with my companionship, such as it is, to poverty and what she will think loneliness. You may imagine that it's a pretty stong conviction that forces me to *that*. There are not many fathers and daughters, I fancy, that are so near each ither as Shelley and I—not many married couples, for that matter."

"Does she know?"

"I consulted her."

"And she agreed?"

"Oh, she had known—a long time. I expect she knew before I did. I have never been able to shut the door against her. Certainly, I haven't often tried! She was relieved that I spoke out and had decided. Of course she feels it; but my bodily presence near her, living a lie, would be no joy to her. Wherever I am, she will be my own flesh and blood. All people call their children that; but Shelley is, all but literally, my own flesh and blood. I almost teathed when she did!" The Bishop gave a jolly laugh, which took the subject out of the tragic zone, and relieved Martin tremendously.

"There's nothing to be solemn over, really," he went on. "Shelley shan't starve, even if she doesn't work or marry. I shall see her when I can, write to her when I can, and be with her in spirit 'as long as we both shall live.' I myself shall be working, I hope, along my old lines (I never liked this Palace business!) without the nagging little feeling all the time that I

was play-acting. We shall all be happier. I feel it."

" Shelley's sure to marry, isn't she? I don't know if it's neck to call her that; but she's my god-sister after all!"

" Of course, call her Shelley. Yes, I don't see how she can escape. I shall be as jealous as purgatory of her husband, I'm afraid. I've not had much cause yet, I only feel sorry for the wretched youths who beg me to 'use my great influence' for them. Martin, you've heard of women being 'irresistible'? So have I, and I've always thought it stuff and nonsense. The thing's so utterly subjective. One man's meat is another man's poison, and all the rest of it. But Shelley, apparently, is literally that."

" You mean that every single man falls a victim? " asked Martin politely. A mixture of curiosity and aversion was in his mind at the thought of the wonderful Shelley. " Shall I ever be quite such a doting father? " he wondered. " Heaven forbid! "

" Every single one—and all the married ones, I'm afraid. And the women. And the children. And the dogs and cats and birds. I feel like the guardian of a fairy-tale princess sometimes."

Martin was respectful, but he grew a little alarmed. It would be equally awkward if he discovered that his good godfather suffered from a particularly violent delusion and this marvel was an ordinary young woman, or if he found himself enslaved against his will and then " turned down." However, his visit certainly began to loom as at least an interesting experience. His

parents had been keen on it, he knew. He chuckled to himself at the notion of the bombshell it would be to them if they knew he was to be subjected to the wiles of a charmer who was not the daughter of the distinguished Bishop Browne, but of what they would consider an apostate, and a hard-up one at that.

“Do my people know?” he asked.

“Not yet. I sometimes think I ought to tell them, before I take you home with me. But you are not a child now, Martin? I confess I shrink from it. Your mother is one of the dearest women I have ever known. It will be something of a wound to see her shrink from me. Your dear old father will think I have gone mad.”

“I’m afraid he will. But, somehow, I don’t think Mother will shrink. And certainly Buffer won’t.”

“*She* won’t. I wonder if you know what luck you have in those ‘people’ of yours.”

Martin felt slightly huffed. The suggestion that the most perfect “people,” are not one’s due, or that one is too gross to sense their perfection, is never welcome.

“But of course you do,” his godfather gratifyingly went on, “and they are lucky too. For years I’d have given my head to have a son like you.”

Martin felt touched and delighted.

“Until Shelley grew up. Then I felt the want of no one.”

“Oh, damn the Irresistible!” Martin thought, disgusted.

“About the ‘shrinkin’,’ ” he said, “surely that’s a

bit out of date? You hear people say now, 'Your friend is a Mohammedan? Oh, do bring him to tea on Thursday! I have a dear little escaped nun coming, and a clever little atheist man. It ought to be *most* interesting!'"

The Bishop laughed, but it was obvious that he was determined there should be a little shrinking. After all, one changes the skin more than the soul in growing older, as he had said himself; and there was quite a good deal of impetuous young Anglican Father Browne, who had fought vicars and swung incense, about Bishop Browne, who had made nobody talk about him for some time. These obscure vanities are perfectly compatible with the most genuinely burning convictions.

"I shan't in the least mind what the ruck say," he continued, as if Martin hadn't been reassuringly funny at all, "but here and there an individual could hurt me if he didn't understand. You relieved me, for instance, when you said that you were 'drawn'; though you appear to be drawn and quartered, if I may say so, with your bracketing of the Salvation Army and the Quakers with the One True Church, as well as with the body to which I presume you still belong—the Church of England?"

"For burying purposes I should have belonged to her 'out there' if I'd been old enough," said Martin, waving a hand in a vague direction, intended to suggest Flanders, "and for purposes of keeping my mother happy I attend services down here. Otherwise I

belong to a sort of general religion of love and so forth, with a particular devotion to the Second Person of a Trinity that historically, so to speak, I am not sure exists. You may well call it a nebulous creed!"

"*That won't do you to go through life with!*"

Martin laughed, and the Bishop looked a little hurt.

"I beg your pardon! I was only thinking of a woman in the Tube the other day. She said to her friend, 'She says to me, "You can't nuss on *water*!"' and I says to 'er, 'But I *dew*!'"'"

The Bishop laughed a little too.

"Well, but you are in the early twenties. You haven't been properly tried."

"Oh, haven't I!" thought Martin. He cast about huffily for temptations. Only the rather diluted temptation of Cousin Adela came into his mind.

"There *must* be others!" he thought disgustedly. But, as a matter of fact, games, sports, books, talk, music and theorizings had so far, filled up his life. Drink and gambling had not seemed to come his way. Nor had women. Martin was an honest child.

"That's very true," he said, mortified.

"Well, then, you'll need an anchor. Why not come in with me?"

"Into the O.T.C.? I couldn't honestly, sir."

"The O.T.C.?"

"I beg your pardon! I meant the One True Church."

"This generation, the best of it, is born without reverence," the Bishop said, a little vexed.

"I don't believe it really is," said Martin, "irreverence is a convention now, just as reverence is perhaps often a convention. But if you said we were born without manners, I'd agree with you."

To Martin's relief, his godfather pursued the new scent.

"I should think so!" he said. "Martin, when I think of the delicate manners of my mother's day, as I see them in here and there a person who survives, I feel old. For to think 'the former times were better than these' is a sign of age in every generation. But there it is. Where do you hear the *exquisite* intonation now, or see the soft, graceful bearing, the gentleness, that women used to have? Your sister, Buffer, has a touch of it (*our* generation would never have let her go by such a name!), and I see it occasionally in some age-old gentlewoman in a white lace shawl and an arm-chair; but it has almost perished, and something lovely has gone with it. No amount of frankness and fineness and freedom will ever make up for it in charm, though there may be a touch more in the scale on the moral side. Honesty, for one thing. Honesty is fine. One grants them that; but one can't agree that it's the only beauty. It seems to me that artists—everybody—think it is."

"'Beauty is truth—truth beauty,'" murmured Martin.

"Yes, of course. But there are lovely aspects of things to be truthful about. You moderns despise them, and only care to be truthful about the ugly

ones. You are always 'facing facts,' but they are invariably ugly facts. Why doesn't one of you face a symmetrical fact in his picture or a melodious one in his music or a musical one in his poetry? Surely the *only* truthful beauty doesn't lie in thin green women with crooked noses, and music that takes care not to come within a mile of a sweet tune, and poetry that takes you all you know to scan, and is all about the Tube lifts and things? I know, because I've talked with all my curates. All the 'High' ones are bitten with it. If you quote Tennyson, they seem on the verge of actual nausea. Old Alfred wasn't the finest poet of the world, as my parents knew he was; but I'm Early Victorian enough to think he could have swallowed most of the Poetry Book Club's young men for his breakfast. Then, I know very well that the 'Every picture tells a story' kind of thing is not good art. But where is the point of drawing a snail and a lamp-post and calling it 'Pan's Lover'? You needn't laugh; I've seen that very picture, and a reverent crowd before it. For one thing, it seems to me extraordinarily easy. Sorry to harangue so. What did we start from?"

But Martin did not want to return to the spot the Bishop started from.

"I quite agree with you, taking it 'by and large,' he said. "I'm not a member of any of the weird cults, though they all interest me. I have a theory about them. You know when you stroke a cat?" He was conscious that he had lately used this simile.

“ At first it likes it awfully and purrs. Then if you go on, all in the same place, for long, it often gives a sudden turn on you and scratches and jumps down. People say ‘ Treacherous beast ! ’ because they haven’t understood. At first, a nerve is titillated, then soothed, then irritated and then maddened, by a touch on the same place. It seems to me it’s like that, isn’t it, with all the old appeals ? They leave the new world numb. The nerve has been touched too often. It simply won’t respond. All the old love words, for instance ! Every novelette has used them, every rotten play, until they’ve simply lost their edge. That’s why the modern boy and girl call one another things when they’re in love that sound to older folk quite casual and ugly, as if they didn’t care at all—at least, I think it is. Then with art, you can’t respond with the same thrill to rhapsodies about the same stock things, in much the same metre, with the same old rhymes, for ever. *Vers libres* are a kind of revolt against decorous rhymes and hackneyed rhythms, just as their subjects are a kind of protest against confining beauty to a selection of approved, respectable things, like sunsets and sentiment. After all, people, especially if they live in towns, can’t really live unless they have some beauty to feed on. It sets them thinking whether there isn’t any in the sordid things all round them. If they find it there, the luckier for them, surely ? Turner started it, with his great rushing train. Why should the colour red, say, be beautiful in the sunset, and hideous in a drunkard’s nose ? Yes,

you are laughing, and thinking I'm an extreme instance of the kind of ass you bar. As a matter of fact, the nose wouldn't enthuse me and the sunset would ; but I should know that I was getting two things muddled up together, the moral sense and the æsthetic—or even the moral sense and the spiritual, if you like ; for a really sacramental universe holds nothing common or unclean. I hope you like a half-baked lecture on the sacramental universe, sir ! It reminds me of the Presbyterian's prayer, ' For such, O Lord ! is the true meaning of this Scripture.' " Martin stopped.

" There's quite a lot in what you say. But one can't resist an instinct that it's mostly just the perverseness of youth, and that these people don't genuinely admire what they profess to. I have a vision of the Cubists gloating over Orchardson and John Collier on the quiet, and the musicians getting their sisters to sing Gounod to them when no one's about, and the poets learning ' Break, break, break ! ' by heart in their off-time. Perhaps they don't. But we were talking about the Catholic Church."

" Now for it !" thought Martin.

" I wonder if you know anything about it ? "

" Yes, I truly do, a bit," said Martin, " of course every one thinks he does ; but my best pal but one was a Catholic, and used to talk half the night about it. At any rate I haven't got the usual errors ! I don't think you believe that the Pope can't sin, or that Our Lady's was a Virgin Birth, or that it doesn't matter what you do so long as you confess it, and all that.

But I heard enough, and saw enough for myself, to know that it's all too definite for me. If you had a jug of a highly doubtful kind, you wouldn't choose the most emphatic and precise label of all to hang round its neck. It would be beautifully restful to come in and submit one's soul ; and if they'd let me, without bringing in the intellect, I sometimes think I would. But you folks are as keen on intellectual assent as anyone. It's all nonsense about your raking in converts at any price. I know a man who begged and begged ; but he had a hazy Modernist sort of belief (rather like mine, I suppose) and they wouldn't let him in."

" I look at it this way," the Bishop said, " it has stood, hardly changed, for centuries. It has more converts now than it ever had, and that among the most civilized, hard-headed modern races. It makes a claim so extravagant as to be preposterous—unless it's true. If it *is* preposterous, would it have stood so long ? And against so much ? And with such people—not with naked savages. Think it over ! "

" Oh, I grant all that already ! Of course it's ' true ' in my sense, but they wouldn't let me in on that ; and I'm a sort of travelling tinker, spiritually. I'm not prepared to say I wouldn't join a dervish dance on the chance of the real ecstasy coming that way. After all, why not ? One ritual's want of dignity, compared with another's, may be sheer convention."

" You youngsters forget that no convention is ever

sheer convention," said his godfather, "it always starts upon a fact of some sort."

"Well, then, the dervish convention may! I think the only difference, really, between our mentality nowadays, taking us in the lump, and yours, is that we are too suspicious of the established and you of the new. We've a profound distrust of ready-made ideas: we feel that they've been acquiesced in without being looked into. The 'facts' they're founded on may long ago have crumbled away. What's the good of living over a false foundation? On the other hand, they may be solid still. All we want is to go down with our farthing candle and inspect; and that is where you think us so irreverent."

"Perhaps so. Yes, perhaps so. After all, we did the same. I did especially. The Oxford Movement seemed sheer revolution at the start, to sober churchmen. Now it surprises no one. It may be the same with all our other little gods. We only ask that you young folks won't set fire to our foundations *before* finding out whether they are rotten or not!"

"Well, the simile holds, sir. If the foundation's solid, a farthing dip won't hurt it. If it's straw——"

"Dialectics," said the Bishop, "and I want my tea. I remember, by the way, the time when afternoon tea was called an insult to lunch and an injury to dinner. I'm as ancient as that."

"Let's go home and insult our dinners," said Martin. "Muriel's made a whopping great cake. I happen to know."

“ Who’s Muriel ? ”

“ The cook. Only cooks have fancy names now. Drawing-room girls are all christened Betty. Poor souls—how it’ll date them all ‘ forty years on ’ ! And all the boys are Michaels and Peters.”

“ Well, the angels and the saints are worthy sponsors.”

“ Yes—only it’s from ‘ Peter Pan.’ ”

The Bishop was a little tired. Youth walks faster and faster in the heat of argument. He was glad when home and tea were reached, with their benevolent, entirely uncontroversial atmosphere. Mrs. Burke was the most restful of created women.

The Bishop wondered whether she knew her ardent-minded son, or only loved him.

“ Nice lad,” he thought, “ but strenuously young. I wonder how he will strike Shelley ! ”

## CHAPTER X

THE Bishop's Rolls-Royce—sumptuous, long-nosed, grey-suèded, aluminium-fitted—noiselessly devoured the miles between the Burkes' house and his Palace in the adorable and sleepy town that sat round a cathedral and watched it all day long. Martin had always had some such impression from the benches round the green, each occupied by one placid, mostly elderly gazer. The old men had pipes and the old women had knitting. Here and there a younger person would leave "John Bull" or "The Passing Show" on a worm-eaten bench. It looked as anachronistic as the great car looked upon the ancient highway. If ever a road was made for a coach and a horn ! thought Martin ; but just then, from a cross-road, came up a coach and horses, a horn making a vast to-do. Not being the real thing, it did not seem a lovely or appropriate thing. "Beauty *is* Truth," he thought again, with obstinacy. The one difference between fact and truth is that Truth is a fact with eternity behind it.

Then they arrived, and then, at last, Martin saw Shelley.

He looked at her with eager curiosity. His first impression was relief, and almost disappointment.

There was certainly no sudden irresistibility to tie your tongue and send you flat before her. On the contrary, there was a sort of warm indifference, if such a thing can be, in Shelley's whole atmosphere that made extraordinarily for ease. Martin walked beside her through the grounds (the car had dropped them at an outer gate, taking the luggage on) and found himself studying her with calm friendliness—almost with cousinship.

"Pretty, decidedly," he thought, "but charming quite as much as pretty—a queer attractive smile that screws her eyes up. Her figure *is* adorable, now! Most English girls, if they're jolly and slim and light like that, have chests as flat as a board. It's only the dumpy ones who are soft-looking. Perhaps it's her Russian mother. It's . . . benignant, somehow." He felt pleased with himself for his cool but appreciative attitude towards a *femme fatale* such as he had imagined Shelley. Mingled with his satisfaction was a faint—the faintest—pique.

He had not been fatuous enough to expect that he would pass the test of Shelley's judgment any more than any other man or boy. The mischief was that she put him to no test whatever. She accepted him with as casual a friendliness as if he had been a middle-aged woman come to stay. He told himself that a Bishop's daughter was a little Queen in a Cathedral town, and that her male society was recruited, probably, from London. Why *should* she "study" him? An unconscious impression of that deplorable desire

to please which has become a fixture on the faces of so many women in man-depleted England possibly influenced him. Adela's attitude helped. It seemed remote, in this green pleasaunce.

Shelley did not ignore her guest. Arm-in-arm with her stately father, both stepping lightly as deer, she gave including smiles and looks at Martin while she talked. Her voice had a good warmth, like the colourings of wallflowers. It was delicate and grave while it discussed the affairs of some one called Charles, which were neither grave nor delicate.

"There are three distinct slurs on Charles's masculinity," she said. "At least, they are not distinct. Charles has selected the darkest corner of the kitchen, under the dresser, on a pile of pitch-black socks. The babies are all pitch-black and you can't tell them from the socks. You put your hand in, and they all spit together. It's a sad trait, rather, that spitting should come so naturally, and purring only gradually. Not one of them has purred yet. Charles looks extraordinarily shamefaced. Well he may!"

"Are his family all pitch-black?"

"Every one of them. Charles evidently admires his own type, and has married into it. Where he found his bride I can't imagine. It may be a case of parthenogenesis. The only visitor he's had in his own rank of life was a lady. Don't you remember how he swore at her and you called him St. Anthony and thought he was resisting temptation? And all the time he was only ousting a rival!"

"Charles has disappointed me!" the Bishop said quite passionately.

"Oh, well, we expected nothing, so he would say he can't have disappointed us, according to the proverb. He's really been better than his word."

"I hope nobody else has?"

"No one," said Shelley, laughing. She had a throaty chuckle that Martin liked. No silver peal of bells business about it. Indeed, the shrill side of life seemed quite left out of Shelley.

"She's much nicer than all that gush about her made one think," he naïvely reflected, rashly inferring that she was less disturbing.

They reached the Palace and Charles met them on the threshold.

"Really, Charles!" the Bishop said severely. Charles looked coy. "I have to adjust all my ideas concerning you."

Charles delicately laid back two deprecating ears.

"After all," said Shelley, "he never said that he was male."

"On the other hand, did he let drop a hint that he was female?"

"He may have been warned of the bow-string and the Bosphorus. Neither he nor his three exact copies in the kitchen would be here to-day if we had known."

"That is no excuse whatever for deception."

"*Pom-Pom!*" said Shelley. "Dinner is in half an hour. Some old, far-off, unhappy things are coming to it. And the Ferrises to leaven them."

"Heavens!" said the Bishop. "Why meet me on my very threshold with naked hordes of natives?"

"Because you made me ask them before you went, my lord. And they won't be as dressy a party as all that!"

They were not. Martin descending, very clean and pink, half an hour later, got a prevailing impression of a vast, lovely drawing-room, looking on immemorial lawns and trees, and, at one end, a moving show of monumental pendants reposing upon solid chests, double chins folding over pearl dog-collars, grey moustaches bristling over shrunken lips, with here and there a young and willowy form in pink or white or blue. As he came, a little diffidently, across the shining lakes of parquet, a figure like a youthful queen's turned and surveyed him. He was startled at the dazzling throat and arms and at the radiance of the chestnut hair. He faltered when the vision came towards him. Then, half-annoyed, discovered her for Shelley.

The body is more than raiment; but raiment, in spite of all prevailing proverbs, is an essential part of beauty. The ordinary tailored Englishwoman is universally declared to look "nice" in her perpetual uniform of navy blue coat and skirt and trim white blouse, and quiet hat of felt or straw. She does look "nice"—extremely so; and niceness is the coolest attribute known. It soothes. It cannot disturb. It levels Helen with every good and comely housewife, well set-up—till you look closer: and to look closely

is to forfeit magic. You should not be able to look closely, appraisingly, at Helen, if you are under seventy. Shelley, tailored and close-hatted, her bright hair and lily flesh concealed, was a pretty girl enough. Martin had thought of her without a tremor. Now . . .

“‘Mine eyes dazzle,’” he said, with a little breathless laugh.

“Well, don’t ‘die young’!” She surprisingly finished the quotation. “Come and talk prettily to a friend of mine.” She led him to a form in pink.

The girl inside the pink, in any other neighbourhood, would have stood out, conspicuously pleasing. She had a pleasant, pretty face, with kind blue eyes. Her figure was the usual, slightly over-thin girl’s figure, collar-boned and apparently flat-chested, held with a boyish grace. Her voice had a sweet, laughing note in it. Martin dragged his eyes from Shelley with a wrench and calmed as she talked easily to him.

During dinner, he had a close but oblique view of Shelley all the time. She sat at one end of the long, darkly-shining table, with its Salviati bowls of orange roses that reflected their delicate heads in the black depths. Martin sat three chairs away, upon her left. He made a gallant effort to entertain his charming neighbour, whose eyes began to twinkle more and more. At last, for very pity, she began to talk of Shelley, and the rush of his response amused her till her good smile broadened. Enid Ferris was happily engaged. Also she adored her wonderful young hostess. The *naïveté* of the very handsome

boy beside her called out the generous motherliness that is the crowning charm of all her type.

"They are each as beautiful as the other," she thought, glancing from radiant girl to beautiful boy, "how pretty it would be . . . but Shelley never does!"

"Miss Browne looks glorious to-night," she ventured.

"Miss Browne?" Good heavens! Of course. That was Venus's surname. How absurd!

"I've never seen her before," said Martin.

"I rather envy you. It must be like seeing the Alps or the sea for the first time."

"Not a bit," said Martin, recovering a little, "both the sea and the Alps were the flattest disappointment of my life. I saw the sea at Weston first, worse luck! All the tide was out. There was about a mile of mud, with shabby boats stuck crookedly in it; and, beyond the mud, there was a grey straight line. 'There,' they told me, 'that's the sea!' I felt like kicking at it in my wrath."

"How sad! And the poor Alps too?"

"Yes. I expected an Alp to be a thing you had to put your head right back on your neck to see the top of. I thought they hung over your path like the hills between Dunster and Dulverton, with spiky tops up in the clouds. And all I saw was some rounded things on the horizon, looking a little like the ballast heaps on the Tyne. I nearly swore."

"I hope they had more luck with you another day?"

"Oh, I was graciously pleased to approve of them,

thank you, when I got up closer ! It's easy enough to want to say your prayers to an Alp when it's *got* you, or to the sea. It was only the first glimpse of all."

Conversation flagged again a little.

" I sometimes think Shelley looks more like a young married woman than a girl," this sympathetic guest remarked.

Martin forced himself to take a steady look at Shelley. It was true. She had nothing of *Sainte Mousseline*. She was *Venus Victrix* dressed by Paquin and coiffed by a clever maid. Perhaps it was her early experience as hostess in a great house that gave her the little superb air.

And he had actually almost thought her " *cosy* " ! He noticed with delight that there was the smallest touch of frost in her pleasant courtesy to the men each side of her, compared with her easy warmth to him. It was as a ready-made intimate, an all-but cousin, then, that she had been so casual, but so kind and sisterly. He was not sure that he liked the rôle, and yet felt proud of it.

She glanced across at him, perhaps attracted by his look. She held his eyes a moment : and then, to his astonishment, her own eyes changed. . . .

It is a line as hackneyed as any in literature :

" She looked at him as one who awakes."

For one spellbound moment, as though he had drunk the cup in " *Tristan*," the two were islanded in

fairy seas. Then they turned, startled, to the diners all around them. No one, apparently, had noticed. Each began talking hard, a little breathlessly, to the nearest negligible ear.

From that moment, the atmosphere of the whole great room changed gradually. After all the inanities written and said and sung about sudden love, after all the modern vulgarities that should have quenched it, here it was, fire struck by sheer beauty in two mortals, pagan and wild and overpowering. The paler civilization all around it felt its breath. Shelley glowed like a white rose with a fire in its heart. Her breast and arms became cruelly beautiful to the boy, lilies of a paradise that was half a place of torment. She burned like a torch to him, with her mantling colours, and her voice that came to him with that strange note of deep excitement in it. All round her, voices rose, and low, excited laughter. Guests leaned forward and looked indulgently. The old sighed and smiled at her radiance. The young envied and wondered. Martin, too, talked vividly, his voice a trifle raised, that she might hear. A trembling flame seemed passing between them. Over and over again it passed. They thought of nothing but each other's eyes, avoiding them in terror, then meeting with a shock and thrill and an intoxication that mounted. Such an hour is worth most hours of a man's life and comes to few. It was a delicate delirium of the senses that gradually made itself felt by every soul at the table. The dried-up among the guests

felt it as a faint glow of well-being, and sipped champagne with greater relish. The observant glanced from Martin to Shelley, intercepting now and then the wave of hidden flame. The merely young felt riotous and smiled into the eyes of stolid or responsive partners. It was a triumph of the magnetic current.

Then Shelley rose. For one wild instant, Martin lost sight of his surroundings. He started up. She was coming to him ! Fool. The women were leaving the dining-room. Was he mad ? He watched her stately young shepherding of the lean and the portly. The door had been shut behind them for some seconds before his eyesight cleared again. He followed the other men to chairs closer to their host. Fortunately, men of weight were present, and they let him sit silent. He took care to listen with apparent bright attention. If he looked neglected, out of it, some kindly bore would turn to him, would question him. Let every one hold off.

Shelley, Shelley, Queen, Helen, Shelley . . . What did she mean ? What was to happen ? Oh, white, white . . . to hold her, to die touching her ! If this was to be nothing, all to end in nothing . . . he could understand how men killed women, killed themselves.

Why, it was like a novelette ! How many yawns he had yawned over stories where you "fell in love" at a look ! Perhaps each single *banal* thing that pleased the public pleased them because at heart, in spite of all the jeering and the blaséness, the things were *true*. Love is "a consuming fire," then. It is not an over-

rated bodily enjoyment, or a slight mental titillation or just a frank good-fellowship, or a reverential respect. It is intoxication of every side of you at once, a sort of tidal wave. He thought of the starry eyes and their strange call to him, and his whole spirit answered, with the tongues of inarticulate poets. Then he thought, again and again, of the breast and arms, camellia white, rose-soft, and his "sense ached at them"—how well Shakespeare knew! Everywhere mediocrity, slight ugliness, fairish good looks. Here and there sheer beauty, glorious, irresistible . . . .

Irresistible! Already! Martin nearly laughed aloud. "Before I saw her," he thought, "I called her 'The Irresistible.' Funny dog, wasn't I? Superior young person! Yes, you are irresistible, you beautiful. You are Helen come again to tempt the world. And you chose me, a lout like me, a puppy, *you*! If I die to-morrow, you will have chosen me to-night, to speak to for an hour."

Ah, but was he the only one? A feeling of sheer nausea swamped him for an instant. Would that be how she charmed them all? Was she the *belle dame sans merci*?—was she Circe?

No. There are looks that cannot lie. Both had felt the mystic current. She was carried on it too. Of course it might be for the evening only. To-morrow, she might see nothing in him. Ah, "to bear her away to a rock for us two"! Martin was discovering that Browning, whom he was modern enough to consider a sort of elderly alderman among the poets, chimed

surprisingly with lovers' hearts when a great moment came.

But she was out of reach, a young princess—and what a setting ! Martin glanced, troubled, round the room. Then, suddenly, that confidence made him so lately by the Bishop came back into his mind. To leave all this—to take it all from Shelley ! His heart leaped. She seemed within his reach, a princess dispossessed. Half consciously, he fixed his mind upon the mental aspect of her, thought of her lot in life, wondered about her nature—anything to banish the sweet poison of longing for her whiteness. It was a desecration, thinking of a girl in that material way only. Still it obsessed him, fevered him. To hold her once. . . . He relapsed into a sort of stupor of the senses, and started when the diners rose.

In the drawing-room, singing was going on. It was of no particular seductiveness or merit, but it enormously enhanced the glamour. It is another of those cheap and obvious instincts that yet have their foundation in something essential that makes stage people bring along " soft music " when the heroine has to draw your tears. Martin sat down close to Shelley, not beside her. By stretching out one hand he could have touched her pearly arms, that now looked long and thinner, stretched like that to clasp her knees. She swayed a little as she sat and listened. He became conscious that the quality of her listening was different from the other diners' listening. She was listening to his thoughts, coloured by the music and strained

through it, but still his. He sent them out towards her with a yearning that drove the blood from his face. They were inarticulate, an incoherent prayer. "Be as beautiful as this, keep this divine, let it mean something. Call me, come to me, take me, take me, answer in some way ! You queen, you star, you looked at me. I am Endymion, you have looked at me. If you look again, I cannot bear it. . . . *Look again !*"

The glamour mounted. The music was the saving of their manners. Neither could have spoken. They were both like tense violin strings waiting for the bow. One twang from the world's coarse thumb would have snapped them catastrophically, even here where the world's representatives were so kid-gloved and gentle.

The oldest guest got up to go. It was a mercifully early hour. With furious trepidation and wild joy, Martin and Shelley blessed her age, that needed rest at ten o'clock or only slightly past. Shelley shook off her stupor with a violent effort. She called on all her young graciousness to make her farewells cordial.

At last the three were left alone. The Bishop found himself looking into two young, mazed, transfigured faces. His mouth twitched slightly.

"Excuse me, won't you, Martin ?" he said. "I have to do a little writing in my study. I'll tell Barnet he can go to bed, and I'll come back to shut things up when you are tired. Shelley will look after you."

He disappeared. Glass doors stood open to enchanted lawns. Martin and Shelley turned to them with one

breathless impulse of escape. It is a mockery of the high gods, that enduring feeling among humans, that a door will let us out. When experience teaches us better, we have one forlorn hope left. We talk of the "gates" of death.

## CHAPTER XI

THEY stood facing one another in the shrubbery that footed the great lawn. Neither spoke. Then Martin gave a low, excited laugh. In a moment he had stretched his arms to her and caught her as she stood. She lay quite unresisting, and he kissed and kissed the whiteness that had fevered him for hours. One touch of deliberation, of the essential coldness of mere lust, and the thing would have been brutal. Their fire, their youth, the sheer bright beauty of them, saved it. Both were in the hold of one of those few moments in a life when there is no questioning, no forcing of sensation. We talk of being "swept away." Few have the experience.

Womanlike, Shelley was floating on a tide of unspoiled happiness. Manlike, Martin's pleasure soon became half anguish.

He raised his head and looked at her. She smiled at him out of a golden stupor, yielding but unresponsive to his need. He pushed her from him.

"Oh, go, go!" he cried. It was a harsh break to their wild idyll.

Shelley started into consciousness. She gave him

a strange look, then turned and ran away from him, a shadow-shape among the trees.

“ Shelley ! ” he cried in an agony ; but she did not return.

That night, a psychologist without bowels of compassion would have found amusement in chronicling the thoughts of Martin and of Shelley.

“ Beast ! ” ran the thoughts of Martin, “ how can I face her ever ? Why ! a man should worship her—a girl like that. He ought to be thankful to tie her shoe-lace ! And I— What will she think of me ? How I have spoilt it ! She’s mine—she must be. My life means nothing if she isn’t. But it ought to have come about . . . differently. I’ve rubbed off all the bloom of it, I’ve spoiled all the loveliness there might have been in getting her to love me. Yet—how could we help it ? Shelley, Shelley, Shelley ! There never was such loveliness, such whiteness ! Warm pearls, white roses. . . . What was that thing you learn when you’re a kiddie ?—oh, The Schooner Something :

“ And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds  
That ope in the month of May.”

Then fever came again, and then remorse, *da capo* and *da capo*.

Shelley, in her great lovely room, was on the heights and in the depths ; but her depths held humiliation, and were crueler than his.

“ What will he think of me ! Facile, a barmaid. . . . How could I ? I have never let one of ‘ them ’ so

much as hold my hand before, if I could help it. I can never face him. Cheap, facile, *cheap*. O God ! and I have spoiled it. If this isn't love at last, I shall never meet with love at all. It might have been so perfect. So exquisite. I could have been his Beatrice —I feel it. What have I been ? Just 'a coming-on young person.' I've heard men say that. And now they can of me. But how could we help it ? I have never seen anyone so beautiful in my life. He is like a sun-god, or Endymion. Good heavens, maundering like this ! It isn't you, Shelley. It's some boarding-school miss, buying picture post cards of a matinée hero.

" No. Shame. I *feel* that that's a blasphemy. It's been the greatest, loveliest, wildest moment of my life. I believe that it was *meant*. I'll think of it when I am old and cold and it will make me young again. Oh, think if I had married one of ' them ' and then met Martin ! I felt that if he didn't hold me in his arms to-night something would snap inside my brain and send me mad. Martin, listen ! I may have spoiled it all, but it was there to spoil. Whatever comes, we went to Fairyland to-night. Not to heaven —to Pan's heaven, perhaps. I dare say there's the other waiting. If only I haven't spoiled it, so that we don't get there ! How can he think of me except as light ? " And so again.

Each felt convinced of lying awake all night ; and each fell sound asleep in some two hours. Emotion is exhausting.

Next morning, an acute embarrassment seized Martin. Some of the glamour had departed, and the pain. It seemed an unmannerliness, the episode of the night. How to face a courteous hostess at the breakfast-table? Why is the breakfast-table life's supremest test and strain and the dinner-table the reverse? When couples wish to marry, they think with apprehension of the breakfast-hour, whereas a "cosy little dinner" has no such associations. Martin heard the booming of a monster gong with a sinking of the heart that might have greeted a maroon in 1917. Reluctantly he steeled himself and, clean and young and nervous, entered the long sunny breakfast-room.

Shelley was there, crisp in a pale pink muslin, busy behind a silver urn. She glanced up as he came in, and her great brilliant eyes met his with defiant, cool politeness. In spite of herself, a flood of sweet-pea pink suddenly stained the soft cheek that she turned from him. An answering flood, almost as delicate, rushed to greet it in her lover's. It was a moment of the prettiest awkwardness; and the Bishop's deep-set, ardent eyes remarked on it at once.

"Dear, dear, dear!" he meditated. "Shelley blushing like a girl in a magazine Summer Number story! This is something new."

He mercifully seized on Martin and talked hard to him. Martin responded with an eagerness that few elderly men can expect from youth in the presence of a lovely girl. The Bishop was still more tickled—and

delighted. He had thought with shamefaced grudging of the day when Shelley would prefer another man ; but of late it had been something of an anxiety to him that she had shown no sign of any capacity for normal love and passion. The tale of her rejected admirers was assuming ludicrous proportions. Soon she would hardly command the same quality in her circle of choice. Quantity there would always be, with such an easy winner. But the Bishop's daughter in a Paquin frock, and the p<sup>r</sup>vert's daughter in a reach-me-down, were different propositions. The Bishop liked young Martin and his people and knew that he had an income of his own. For himself he cared less for money than most living men, but he hated the idea of a cheap frame for his matchless picture.

Meanwhile he talked upon a subject that in common politeness was bound to fix Martin's desperately wandering thoughts. He spoke of his own plans. Shelley was evidently listening, though she still at first showed only an averted, slightly "haughty" profile, as the men decided, one with amusement. Soon the sheer interest of the subject caught her. She drew her chair in closer, and grew absorbed. Martin felt as in old nursery days, when Buffer had said "Pax," without prejudice to future hostilities. Then he, too, grew keen to hear the plans.

"There must be no propaganda in my farewell sermon—that's quite certain. It would not be playing the game to use an Anglican pulpit to advertise Popery ! I shall write all the necessary letters, from the Arch-

bishop downwards, when I get back, and relegate every function that I can. I'm afraid it's bound to be a bombshell." The Bishop sighed with satisfaction.

"Oh, perhaps not!" said Martin fatuously.

The Bishop stared a little coldly, and Martin saw a dimple irresistibly break the outline of the cheek he still furtively watched.

"It will, though, of course," he hastily amended.

Then Shelley laughed outright, and met his eyes quite kindly. He hastily summoned an abject penitence into his own, which made her look away again.

"Daddy's longing for brickbats," she said, to explain her laugh. "As a matter of fact, he'll probably have every district visitor in the diocese begging 'Mayn't I come too?'"

"God forbid," the Bishop said. "I'll tell the lot to stay where they are. The idea!"

"What about the one lifeboat, Daddy? Oughtn't you to cram them into it?"

"Pshaw!" said Daddy, or a sound to that implied effect. "If they like to see sense and come in when they've seen it. . . . As for tagging after me *because* of me! . . . But then they wouldn't. Not such fools."

"Well, you don't make very good breakfast-table propaganda, I must say!"

"I'm not play-acting, child."

"Of course not, darling. It's my vulgar flippancy. How are you going to say it, in the sermon?"

"I don't know yet. I'm anxious to avoid the pocket-handkerchief act. And yet I don't want just ungraciously to say I'm leaving them all. Of course I could let it alone and preach as usual ; but I'd like them to remember me kindly ; and they won't do that if they hear the fact baldly, from anyone but me."

"Well, it'll be dreadfully agitating and interesting," said Shelley. Martin rather wondered at her callousness, at such a juncture of her father's faith and fortunes. He did not know that Shelley was inwardly saying to herself, with rather rueful chuckles : "I give him just three years!" Her love for the brilliant, erratic child who happened to be nearly fifty and her father was strong enough to live without illusions.

"When do you have to leave—all this ?" asked Martin regretfully. He waved his hand towards the lovely lawns outside the breakfast-room.

"As soon as we can get out. We've been making clearances for months, haven't we, Shelley ?"

"Well, I've destroyed about twenty-five of your fouler pipes, darling, and given my accumulations of evening frocks to demoralize the deserving poor ; but I feel rather at a loss about the actual move. Shall we be flogged out of the Close at the cart's tail, do you think ? That's what you'd like best—for yourself, I mean."

"I believe you think I am simply doing all this because I'm hankering after martyrdom." The Bishop glared aggrievedly.

"Well, I know you thrive on brickbats, and starve on loaves and fishes, don't you? Remember the good old days when you tried Benediction on them!"

"Martin," said his godfather, "if there's anything on earth more trying to live with than a woman who really understands you—go and live with it, that's all!"

"There's episcopal advice for you—Martin," said Shelley. She began gaily, but faltered a little on his name.

"Take the boy out," said the Bishop, getting up. "I can't hear myself think, with all this schoolgirl chatter!"

"You don't care to eat to-day, I suppose?"

"Eat? Why?"

Shelley looked meek, and jingled her keys.

"Oh, go and order things, then—anything, so long as you go!"

"Harsh words from such a *pretty* mouth!" sighed Shelley. She went slowly to the door with hanging head. Both men looked after her with infatuated smiles. Then they caught each other's eyes and laughed.

"Out you go!" said the Bishop. "And have a cigarette on the lawn. She'll join you soon, and show you the view from Black Monk's Hill. Prophetic name, perhaps."

Martin went out obediently. An interior so merrily domestic seemed to him queer preparation for the

cloister. He felt a fierce aversion from the cloister. Could you not keep a cloister in your soul, and live in the open? Still, every man to his own master-bidding.

His thoughts returned to Shelley. How could she take it all so lightly? It must be the disintegration of her happiness. Perhaps that was the reason. Perhaps she was making it easier for her father. It was obvious that she could have stopped the whole thing by entreaties. The Bishop would then have found his martyrdom in renunciation of his new desire. Martin was beginning to understand his godfather, and to love him none the less for taking him less seriously.

What would she do, Shelley? A girl like that to be poor, to work! He could imagine her working. She probably worked now. You could not run a Palace, socially and domestically, and not work pretty hard. But she ought to walk in silk attire. She ought to sleep on roses. . . .

She appeared, in anything but sybaritish gear. A Panama and sturdy brogues looked workman-like.

"I've brought your hat out," she said, "then we can go out at the kennel gate. You don't mind dogs?"

"Mind them!" said Martin. "We're all silly about them at my home. We have a sort of bobbery pack, all kinds and colours."

"So have I!" cried Shelley. The *gêne* had gone

from both of them. By the time they had released two dogs and disappointed four, the fever of the night before had completely left their memories for the moment. They were hardly even lovers, just English youth and maid, with a June morning oxygenating their blood.

They whistled and sang, climbing the fragrant hill, as though they had been brought up in the same nursery. All sense of strain had given way to an exhilarating sense of freedom.

“Phew!” said Martin, flinging himself on the heather at the top, and fanning vigorously with his hat.

“Don’t fan *me*,” said Shelley, “or the dogs will think that you’re attacking me, and turn and rend you.”

“Which side would you take? A lot would depend on that.”

“Oh, I should cheer them on, and go home to lunch, of course, leaving your bones on the hill-side.”

Martin fanned harder than before.

“The dogs are mortifyingly unmoved,” said Shelley; “fancy if Una’s lion had only *looked* formidable, and just sat and washed its legs when anything attacked her!”

“I wonder if you’ll need a lion,” said Martin thoughtfully. “What are you going to do, after the dramatic renunciation?”

“Well, I shall have three hundred a year,” said

Shelley, " that's enough for bread, if not for circuses ; but I want to work, if anyone can use me."

" What sort of work ? "

" Well, can you tell me ? That's just it. It sounds so priggy, but . . . I do want to make the sorry scheme a wee bit jollier—*you* know."

He nodded vigorously.

" The worst of all the organized things is that you get caught in the machinery, don't you think ? There are secretaries and jealousies and people who are 'influential' and must be allowed to spoil all you try to do. There's precious little that goes direct, it seems to me."

" I know. I'm not clear what to be at, either. There must be plenty of real work somewhere. What about that Welfare business ? "

" Yes. But it seems such blazing cheek to go into the house of some woman who hasn't asked you, and then lecture her about the treatment of the babies that she's had and you haven't. I wonder how they stand it. But while babies are still fed on cheese and sardines and given ' little sups o' beer,' I suppose it's really necessary."

" I feel rather like that about the C.O.S.," said Martin. " I remember hearing of a case where the people at head-quarters were as sympathetic as they could be. There was no end to their delicacy and generosity and all that. But they had to take the helpers they could get. This time, the person to be helped was a touchy little lady, nearly destitute. It was explained to them

that she would literally starve before she let herself be patronized and pitied. Well, the day came for her turn, and the girl they'd meant to send was ill. They 'instructed' another one quickly, and forth she went. She came back scarlet and nearly crying, and said the 'case' had insulted her. It seems the defiant little soul had bragged of all her grandest friends and relatives, whereupon the visitor had said, 'If you know so many people, I expect you are often given a good square meal?' That was her tactful way of putting it—and it simply did for the whole thing. The 'case' as good as turned her out."

"That seems to show that one might do some good C.O.S.'ing," Shelley said. "You can guess that what tact one has doesn't get rusty when one's Daddy goes Bishoping! I'm trying to tell you with becoming modesty that my tact is notorious."

"I can well believe it," said Martin, with fervour.

"Seriously," said the girl, "what's the most useful thing to go in for—assuming that one's any *real* use?"

"Good heavens, I want some one to tell *me* that! I'm going begging too. Let's go begging together!"

"We've got no work to do—oo—oo," she chanted. "One doesn't hear that in the streets, these days. One did, when I was younger. The processions and the barrel-organs are the last survival of it. I never like to stop and read those poor legends about the seventeen

children and the rest, because it raises hopes ; and, if you're going to give your coppers, you might as well give them at once and go on."

"They're not so bad as the people who silently hold out boxes of matches," said Martin ; "every box I don't buy makes me feel a brutal capitalist, with my packet of a dozen in my desk at home."

"It's all wrong, somehow," she agreed.

And if a deep secret satisfaction was saying to both, "It's all right for *us*, anyway !" it need not be counted for callousness, in the circumstances.

"Tell me about *you* !" said Shelley.

And looking away from her, the beauty of a June hill-top making his voice dreamy, but somehow releasing his spirit, he poured out his plans and hopes, as convinced of their importance and their novelty as if the young men had not seen visions from the day the hills took shape.

She listened, with her eyes upon his face. At last he turned to her, struck by her silence. She was caught. She had not time to take the lovely, overwhelming answer from her look. He faltered, stopped. She turned her face away.

"Oh, Shelley, Shelley !" he said brokenly. He stretched his arms up to her as he lay.

For one moment she recalled her "cheapness" of the night before, and held herself away from him. The next, she bent down to the longing arms. He gave a sort of cry and held her, trembling. This time it was the spirit that was uppermost, with no admitted

impediment of false shame or of true. In spite of all our desperate sad wisdom, we know of some such moment in the lives of most, and set it against the cruelty of living.

## CHAPTER XII

INSTINCTIVELY they both drew back from one another before the enervation of contact had swamped their senses. With the fresh breeze blowing from the hill-tops in their faces, it was easy to keep their spirits on the heights.

"We'll think of this all through our lives if ever we get stale," said Martin; "this is a high place where it's easy to refuse the kingdoms of the earth. We *will* refuse them, darling?"

"I renounce them all," said Shelley. "We'll tilt at all their windmills. And we won't be Superior Persons either."

"Heaven forbid! We'll drink with our fellow-publicans and sinners. (Isn't it hard to think of publicans being tax-collectors? It sounds so respectable. I always think of them as jolly fellows who kept the public-houses.) We'll make our plans and stick to them. We'll spend ourselves—*hard*. We'll be old and ugly long before our time, and every one will call us fools who've wasted their opportunities."

"We'll be hilarious martyrs to Things as they Are."

"In the hope of changing them an inch or two in the direction of Things as they Might Be."

"That's the idea. . . . What started you, Martin? At first, I mean."

"A secret passion."

"I wonder if it's the same as mine!"

"Why, have you got one?"

"Yes, it's a—person."

"So's mine, in a way."

"I believe it's the same!"

"It must be. I don't know how to say it. Yet I hate the sort of sheepishness that stops me."

"Martin, it *is* the same! Your saying that just proves it. Tell me! is it because it sounds sort of snuffling and evangelical and spoilt by years and years of associations that you're sheepish about it?"

"Exactly. I'll say it straight out, and be damned to sheepishness. It is for the character of the gorgeous hero, Jesus Christ. We've beslavered him with sanctimonious lip-service for such centuries that now we've made him as trite as a penny Union Jack. We've nullified the very Resurrection, making him so dead. Even we two squirmed just now at mentioning his name. It's a shameful thing. I nearly worshipped Chesterton for showing him the thing of force and fire he was. The Christmas almanacs are more blasphemous than any atheist."

"I know. I know. The churches get farther from him every day. If the world could only drink a cup of Lethe, and then hear of him again! If they would just stop intoning about him and putting up buildings to him, and realize him for a day, there'd

be no wars, no cruelty, no selfishness, no sweating . . . Oh, Martin ! ”

“ We are married, you and I,” said Martin, growing white, “ married as much as if we’d had a thousand weddings and a hundred years together.”

“ Yes . . . that’s what we’re out for, then : to live as like him as we can, and to be a sort of *Lobgesang*.”

“ That’s what we’re out for.” They looked silently across the hills. Their hearts beat high.

“ Mind you,” said Martin, “ I don’t feel orthodox, at all. I rather wish I did. I can’t believe in Virgin Births and things. I don’t even know (I was trying to tell your father) if He’s my favourite character in fiction, even ! It’s difficult to explain. It’s something like this, to me. People talk to you of Shakespeare, and argue whether he was a butcher’s son or a glover’s, and whether he really poached on the Lucys’ estate, and all that ; and all the time when you say ‘ Shakespeare ’ you don’t think of a word of all that. It doesn’t seem to matter.”

“ That’s what I feel too. I haven’t told Daddy, though ! ”

“ No . . . It’s very illogical—but I can pray to Him, Shelley ! ”

“ Why, so can I ! Perhaps we can get clearer some day. I just try not to think of anything but the spirit of him and his life. There’s something there that listens, and I call it Jesus Christ because he stands for it. Perhaps the story is just God’s baby-

talk for us. We can't talk His language. We're just children."

"Yes. I think that's what I mean."

They got up and went soberly across the heathy plateau, hand in hand. As they reached the lower levels, their mood changed.

"I'm starving!" cried Shelley. "Let's run home to lunch!"

They pelted down the gentle slope, arriving breathless at the bottom.

"What will your father say?" asked Martin.

"To—us? He'll like it, I expect. It worries him that I have never—cared. Especially just now. By the way, have you any money, Martin?"

"Oh, yes, enough. You have some, too, haven't you? There's no reason why we shouldn't be married straight away, is there, darling? Then he could feel he wasn't leaving you alone."

"How heavenly! Martin, I'm not being a bashful maiden at all! I ought to look down and fidget with something, oughtn't I? No, don't look like that! I promise I won't spoil it. We can afford to be dead honest with each other, can't we?"

"Dead honest, partner . . . *O, my queen!*"

He caught her hand. This time it had a different, less comradely feel. She drew her own away, and fled into the house.

He followed, his nerves tingling.

The Bishop was in a deep chair in the hall, frowning over "The Church Times." He looked up as Martin

came towards him. He had seen that look before. This time, his sympathy told him, he would not have to kill it. With all his preoccupation, he was woman enough to have watched his daughter.

"Well?" he said, with his kind smile.

"It is well," said Martin. "It's so gorgeously well, I can't believe it."

"I don't pretend that I'm not delighted, and furiously jealous, for I'm both. But it was bound to come, and now I shall not be leaving her alone. Where is she?"

"I'm here, Daddy, feeling an ass."

Both men looked up. There is a picture, drawn by Thackeray, of Beatrix coming downstairs, that has enchantment in it. Shelley hanging over the banisters, smiling but nearly tearful, all her pure, bright colours touched to radiance by a shaft of sunlight, was an improbably dazzling sight. Her two lovers each wrapped up the picture in his heart.

"Come down and be serious. I'm on the heavy father tack."

She came, and took his hand and Martin's. No one of the three said anything. The Bishop felt a sudden wave of desolation and misgiving, not for her happiness but for his own.

"I'll talk later—later," he brought out brokenly.

"Go away, my Martin," said Shelley, and she stayed with her father.

When the three met at lunch, Shelley was under eclipse. *Pace* the novelists, there is no woman alive

whose beauty is improved by crying. Her eyes were swollen and her whiteness stained. Martin looked at her, and was overwhelmed by the tenderness for her that filled him.

"It's not her beauty, really," he thought happily, "that was the sign-post that showed the way to her. It's her bedrock self I adore. *Adore*, do you hear, Shelley? If ever I make you grieve!" He felt an utter confidence in the certainty of her happiness. Young love has always that much of optimistic fatuity.

The Bishop talked of plans and practicality, and Shelley brightened more and more. All sounded blissful. The Burkes were to be written to. Shelley was to go and stay with them. Mrs. Burke was to come to the Palace and choose her trousseau with her. Then the great change was to be made in her father's life, and an absolutely quiet wedding to take place. The Burkes were to be told at once of what they would consider the perversion. How they would take it, Martin could not tell; but they knew Shelley, and all loved her. It was only Martin who had always missed her visits.

"Shelley will have three hundred a year," the Bishop said; "how much have you, if any?"

"Oh, I'm the family millionaire!" said Martin, "there's between six and eight hundred a year—it varies. My grandfather left it to me. We'll be able to run to quite a handsome top-floor back in the slums, and Shelley can put out the washing. Why do you

want to bother [about three hundred a year? You may need it to buy rosaries and things.]

"I'm keeping two hundred. If I am admitted into the Order, I shall give it over, and have no more need for pass-books. If not, it will make me more useful as a priest."

"Daddy," said Shelley suddenly, "*are you sure?*"

Her father looked at her a little wildly. He looked round the pure and stately room, and out at the wide lawns of his garden, at the graceful trees—and beyond them, at a sky that bathed the soul in peace.

"I am sure," he said, and meant it. It is not the false emotions only that suffer change: this man had never had a consciously false emotion.

"Why are you frightened for him?" Martin asked when lunch was over and they were alone.

"Because—is it disloyal?—because I know what it has always been with him. He is a fighter. He cannot live without a little persecution. The cushiness of all this has been stifling him. 'The dear Bishop' and all the approval everywhere, and no pricks to kick against."

"Well, then, he'll surely be happier when he's shaken it all off."

"Yes, for a time—while he's attacked. But later on, when the shouting has died down, and he's just an exemplary friar who has contributed a nice little sum to the Order and conferred great kudos on the Church? It'll be 'the dear ex-Bishop' and again no pricks. He

can't fight hardships and the want of luxury, for they've never revolted him. He never knows what he's eating, and he likes camp-life much more than civilized. A tin cup won't worry him, or oatmeal for his dinner, or whatever they have. In Lent, in the old days, he used to live on bread and salt or something very like it. . . . If I knew that he had Catholic convictions that would last, it would be different. I prophesy that there'll be another renunciation in a few years' time, and he'll have thrown away so much!"

"Can't we do anything?"

"Nothing in the world."

"Then, let's be bone selfish and talk about ourselves."

"Ourselves," included not only mutually admired perfections but ways and means.

"My notion was," said Martin, "to go and work at a trade in some slum-factory. Don't see how I can take the Queen of Sheba with me there!"

"Good heavens, boy, how patronizing! 'Take' me! I was going to do something of the sort myself, even if I had never met the world's greatest reformer. You want to be the only one written as one who loved his fellow-men. I see it all."

"The poor young fellow," replied Martin, "was much embittered by an early marriage with a shrew, who turned upon him with the utmost venom on the first day of their betrothal. . . . Aren't you too glorious, with the sun on your hair!"

"My hair will make a great hit in the slums. I shall

let it down when drunkards come to tea and I have to make them leave off drinking——”

“ They’re dead certain to think you’ve been drinking yourself if you do ! Seriously, shouldn’t I be a beast to bury you in some foul place—after all this ? ” He waved his hand.

“ It shan’t be foul. It’ll be profoundly interesting. *Homo sum.* I’ve always yearned for leadless glaze and a little Dutch dresser instead of a side-board.”

“ I’m afraid you’re Hampstead playing at the Simple Life, not young Burke’s missus cooking the supper for him.”

“ Young Burke, I can cook such a supper that it’s worth marrying me for that alone ! Have you ever tasted trout broiled over a camp-fire ? ”

“ Darling, that’s just it. It won’t be picturesque. It may be squalid. You see, I don’t want us to take what money we have into it. It wouldn’t be playing the game. At least, it would ; and we’re in earnest, Queen.”

“ Of course we won’t take money. But how shall we live until you’ve got the work ? ”

“ We won’t emigrate until we’ve got it. I can go touting about with a handkerchief round my neck instead of a collar. It’s humiliating what a ruffian that makes one look.”

“ And I’ll go round room-hunting in unwomanly rags ! ”

“ Not by yourself ! ”

"There you are ! Sheba'ing me again. I'm Burke's missus. Don't you forget it ! "

"How heavenly ! "

"I shall go out alone with a string-bag and buy sausages and haggle over herrings when we're married —so why not begin now ? "

"I must find out how much my colleagues usually spend on furnishing. We'll make that do. I can't help it if I haven't saved it first, as they have."

"I believe they go to those 'We do all the rest' places in Tottenham Court Road and pay so much a week. They send to drag away your bed, the first week that you haven't paid. Do let's go there ! "

"We'd get landed with a nice plush suite or something, shouldn't we ? "

"No, we needn't. We can pick and choose, so long as we only pledge ourselves for the usual amount. I expect there are dear little plain things we could buy. We'll be an example to all the other Burkes and their missuses."

"Highly Superior Persons, in fact."

"Oh, heaven forbid ! I expect we'll soon get taken down a peg or two. We needn't worry."

"Why shouldn't I work at a trade too ? " Shelley suggested later.

"Who's to cook the sausages if you do, and keep the place clean ? "

"Well, plenty of married women do go out and work. I expect it means getting up an hour or two earlier, that's all ! "

Shelley looked valiant. She also looked so ludicrously Bond Street that Martin suddenly felt a breath of unreality blowing on the scheme.

"I believe it will be like cutting timber with a razor, darling. It won't work. We'd better write or speak or something."

"*You* may write and speak. I'm going to tuck my sleeves up and do *work*." She tucked them up in anticipation.

"Look at your silly, lovely arms, like wax!"

"You wait till they've been in the wash-tub for a year or two! They'll get all flabby crinkles like their betters."

"Shelley—I'm a coward already. I can't have your beauty ruined. After all, it's a marvellous great gift from Heaven. Don't you feel it is?"

Shelley grew serious.

"I rather love it myself and feel like that about it," she said gravely, "but it will only be a snare if it's going to stop you doing what you want to do."

"What does he want to do?" The Bishop had come back to them.

They both poured out their plans, Martin with misgiving and Shelley with enthusiasm. Her father smiled but looked concerned.

"It wouldn't work," he said, "but both of you have sense enough to own up when you've tried it, if it is a failure. You'll have your money waiting for you. I only ask you one thing as a favour. Don't burn your boats. Don't throw away your money, in how-

ever good a cause, until you're thirty-five at least."

"Thirty-five!" cried both the twenties, as who should say "A hundred!"

"Yes, thirty-five. Is it a promise?"

"I suppose so," reluctantly, from Shelley.

"Yes, it's a promise," Martin said.

The Bishop looked enormously relieved.

"You might go down and look around and learn to know your factory-folk before beginning to amalgamate?" he suggested.

Both were convinced that this was wrong.

"Don't you see that we should be detected at once for a kind lady and gentleman taking an impertinent interest in how the poor live? It would never do, Daddy!"

"I do think it might be fatal if there was a hint of patronage," said Martin. "We should never get to know them in the way that people know their friends."

Martin still felt doubtful. That one touch about the crinkly arms of his radiant lady stuck in his imagination.

"After all, it's only what *you're* doing, Daddy!"

"I have had my pleasures and palaces. It's a poor fag-end that I can offer. Look at my white head and then at all this sunshine!" and he touched the two bright heads benignantly. Shelley caught his hand and kissed it.

"Look at this scholar's hand, how delicate," she said, "and yet it thinks it's going to do all sorts of

heavy things. Or do you just tuck them in those long, muffy sleeves and meditate all the time? ”

“ At first,” said the Bishop with relish, “ I believe you scrub, and things of that kind, but I’m not quite sure. You do whatever comes, I know. I’m quite prepared for that.”

“ *Won’t* he be sold if they set him to play the harmonium? ”

“ No reverence. No sympathy,” her father said.

“ None,” said Shelley firmly, with a look that melted in the middle.

“ Ah, well,” her father said, “ King Lear and I have much in common. It’s Martin that I pity.”

“ Give me a ring to throw into the river! ” Martin said, “ which reminds me—talking of rings. . . . ”

They talked of rings.

## CHAPTER XIII

FOUR months, pregnant with happening, were gone and over. In those four months, the Bishop had made his affecting, ambiguous farewell, leaving a tearfully bewildered diocese. From simony through adultery to ordinary drunkenness, reasons had been wildly assigned by the disgruntled faithful. The truth, when it appeared, was something of a disappointment. Papists were almost fashionable. So indeed were adulterers ; but a Bishop co-respondent would have justified quite a good deal of pleasant horror. When it was known that, like the dying, Bishop Browne "took nothing out" with him (for what are a few paltry hundreds after one of the richest Sees in England ?) there was a strong tendency to hero-worship among the set who presented plaster images. A marble Madonna was even hysterically suggested, but for a fear that "Romans" might consider an Anglican Mary an impertinence, and another fear, horrifyingly profane, that her head might become detached in transit, turning the gift into a vague but awful symbol of his forsaken flock. He sighed in public and gloated a little in private over a ton and a half of flustered correspondence ; then he assisted, in the French and

figurative sense, at the excessively quiet wedding of his beautiful daughter.

Major and Mrs. Burke had been carried off their four decorous feet by two onslaughts : the first made by the Bishop, announcing in one breath his extraordinary somersault out of the Palace and the imminent entry of his daughter into their family ; the second the arrival of Martin and Shelley, radiant to incoherence and full of plans that suggested the Red Flag and the Salvation Army in equal parts.

Two situations so violent and so unexpected found the parents short of ammunition. They gazed at all three delinquents, wringing gentle hands and gasping. Not until Shelley had artfully invited Mrs. Burke to help her choose a "thoroughly sensible" trousseau, and the Bishop had had one of his old, familiar "*Daily News*" versus "*Morning Post*" tussles with the Major, and Martin had almost forgotten Shelley in his rapture at the birth of several heirs to his retriever bitch, did normality seem the rule again. After all, felt the parents, it might have been worse. The daughter of even a "late" Bishop was better than the daughter of a present greengrocer. Shelley was Shelley, and incomparable ; while as to Martin's fads—well, the dear boy was still young. Wait and see what a nursery would do for him and his sweet girl. For the Bishop they felt affectionate pity. Such a dear fellow, but erratic—always had been. One must follow one's conscience, even into monasteries. The unacknowledged thought that nowadays one can follow it

out again, if necessary, may have soothed their perturbations.

"After all, you know, *you* founded the Atheist's Club when you first went to Oxford!" provokingly remarked the Major.

"So I did!" replied the Bishop, with the peculiarly tender smile that we reserve for contemplation of our past selves; "that's when I vowed that if I ever had a child he should be called Shelley."

"Oh, I'm the seed of atheism, then?" said Shelley. "What else did the Club do, besides denying its Creator in the days of its youth, and plotting to make the poor Unborn ridiculous?"

"It ate a good deal and drank a good deal more, and closed for lack of subscriptions, so far as I remember."

"Why did people fall off?"

"Times had changed. No one took the faintest notice of us. As soon as we found that most of the men senior to us looked upon us as rather silly little boys the thing fizzled out. The Anglo-Catholic development was all the fashion with second and third year men and some of the dons. I soon got drawn into that."

"The rest is history," said Shelley, "which will be continued in our next—phase."

"If ever you have daughters, Martin, they'll look upon you as a source of harmless amusement at your most poignant moments."

"Probably," said Martin. He wondered if the daughters would have Shelley's hair and eyes.

"Amusement is not so much the word as natural anxiety," said Shelley, blushing a little at the idea of daughters. "To have a father liable to annual enthusiasms is a sign of the times, I suppose. I find it agitating."

"Enthusiasm is life itself. I would rather outlive my eyes or my appetite."

"So would I!" said Martin.

Shelley looked motherly and superior. "I shall have to be a miracle of callous balance," she remarked; "all the time I can spare from the wash-tub I shall have to be throwing cold water. It's a dampish sort of future."

"Wash-tub?" asked the Major.

Shelley explained the plan.

"Martin, you don't really mean this nonsense?"

The Major looked at the Bishop as if it had been his own daughter who was to be sacrificed to the nonsense.

"Father, I thought you knew! We've talked it over often enough with mother and the girls. Buffer approves. She'd like to do the same."

"Bless my soul! You young idiots nowadays don't know your luck! Here's the most beautiful girl in England. First her father kicks her out of the Palace that is her proper setting. Then her husband proposes to let her take in washing in a slum! Preposterous nonsense! Shelley, my dear, put down your foot."

"No good, father. She's in it, too."

"I'm afraid so, Major darling. Never mind. It won't do anything to me. I promise to stop if it does."

We don't want to play about any more. We've done nothing with our lives, so far, but talk."

"Your lives! You sound as if you were forty! Why not wait till you are?"

"Good heavens!" Shelley cried. "That's just what bores every one with good works, the poor people most of all! Why should no one go near them but withered hags? It must be hateful for them."

"Don't worry, Burke!" the Bishop murmured.

The two fathers glanced at one another with a twinkle. The mutual affectionate distrust of the generations in one another's powers of endurance was amusing.

"They don't believe we'll stick it," Martin said.  
"We'll show 'em!"

There was nothing that could well circumvent the two. Martin had his own moderate income from his mother's father. The Bishop would have given Shelley hers if she had proposed to endow a lunatic asylum with it. House-hunting set in hotly, prudently undertaken by Mrs. Burke in homely array. Her motherliness and entire simplicity carried her into any spot: and her choice of as pleasant a little street and hygienic a little house as the zeal of the juniors would permit to be called "slums" at all was a relief to all but the devoted couple, who yearned for fever-haunted garrets, led up to by a rickety staircase.

The wedding, as I said (yes, chair and all, I, Arthur, come into this act), was more than quiet. I was present. Indeed, it happened "from" our house. There was

an obvious difficulty in having it at the bride's own home, that being a transitional spot between Palace and slum-dwelling in the form of a suburban hotel. To have it at the bridegroom's home offended Mrs. Burke's sense of Shelley's dignity, much as she longed to play the mother.

"It would look," she said, "as if Martin had picked up some friendless nobody instead of being lucky enough to secure a little princess like our dear Shelley."

Madge, ever alert when there was a favour to be granted that brought her a return in amusement or kudos, caught at the notion of offering her house and chaperonage. The few invited were told that it was in kindness to poor Arthur, who could not otherwise be there; and indeed the wedding proved to be my life's great turning-point. It brought me Buffer, grown from the enchanting, too shy schoolgirl I remembered, to the nearest approach to the ideal in women that I was capable of imagining. Three days of her (she stayed behind her parents for a week) showed me that here, if I were free and not a wretched cripple, was my one enormous chance of happiness on earth. It also showed me that she liked my fretful presence, understood my thoughts, discounted all that jarred, and pitied with that utter sympathy that makes pity verily akin to love and not to patronage.

However, it is Shelley's wedding and not Buffer's I am writing of.

Shelley was in bridal white, in spite of the mere handful of spectators. Martin had pleaded for such a

vision of her, "white roses to remember." He got his way. She shimmered and glowed and looked preposterously beautiful. It was absurdly like a theatre-scene, the two decorative young creatures, each on fire with happiness. I had seen many weddings with a respectable stock-in-trade of satisfaction. They were Bloomsbury next to Elysium, compared with our fair couple. I was reminded of H. G. Wells's maxim, "Warm-blooded marriage or none"; and when really surprising beauty is added, not to speak of vehement hopes for the regeneration of the world, the thing becomes fantastically pretty. I watched Buffer and saw her eyes upon the bride and on her brother. If ever benignancy shone out of steadfast eyes. . . . No. I cannot write of that day except by writing of my love and not of Martin's. Exit, myself and my chair.

Martin had struggles with himself about this time. His fear was Shelley's beauty. He could not forget that first wild desecration, as it now appeared to him.

"Supposing," he had argued, "all this lovely sympathy is Nature's lure—the usual thing. Supposing all I feel is the satyr desire for the nymph. What if all my highfalutin plans of working hand-in-hand are just a self-deception? If she were stunted and had spectacles, would I have dreamed of trying it, even if she had been the essential Shelley all the time? What if I fail her? She is a flame and I am only clay, perhaps, for all my flickerings."

The healthy common sense that was so strong in him at normal times had left him for the moment. There are no more feverish months in a man's life than the months of an engagement. However primitive the emotions that lead to one, the interval itself is purely anti-natural. The upshot of Martin's doubting was that he introduced a tension into Shelley's happiness for which he cursed himself.

"When knights were bold," he blurted out one day, "they had a rather decent custom. They kept a sort of vigil for three nights after marriage, to be more worthy of the bride, and of the high estate. Don't you agree that that's the real spirit?"

Shelley laughed a little.

"I was only thinking of dear old Sir Thomas Wilson; you said 'knights,'" she explained.

Martin looked hurt.

She glanced at him and saw the trouble in his face. Her look changed and she coloured a little.

"Yes, I think it was a beautiful idea," she said. But it obscurely hurt her and brought a shamefaced note into one side of her idyll. She left him soon and stood alone in her room, staring over Wimbledon Common with eyes that saw the cricket-playing children as trees walking.

"Is he going to be ashamed of love? He would say that . . . *that* is not love really. How can he divorce the two? Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder. He has joined body and soul. No, Martin, you are wrong, I think, beloved. You

are not dedicating the flesh. You are just afraid of it. That seems to me a sort of blasphemy. I could talk quite openly to you. I think I have no shame, with you. It's only that words sort of kill . . . desire. I dare say it's the courtesan in me, and that I'm not so clean as Martin ; but I will not spoil the earth-side. It is lovely too. I don't believe the spirit really wars against the flesh. I never have. It only wars against the things that harm the flesh. That's dangerous, perhaps. I don't know. Anyway, if Martin feels it's wrong to love me that way, I shall fight him with all the beauty I possess. I don't want to be Circe to him or a temptation of St. Anthony. I want that side to be a gift of God to both of us. I hope we shall have divinely lovely children. How should they come out of anything that's evil . . . to be avoided ? No, I may be wicked, but *I* think I'm just wholesome ! "

She dressed that night to charm, and dazzled Martin. His thoughts danced obstinately from the knightly abnegation. They simplified enormously. And when, at their good-night, she took the lead for the first time, and threw herself with a soft violence on his breast and kissed him long and deeply, that haunting shame of his soon perished in the flames.

But when their wedding-day had come and they had driven away together, and had dined at the Carlton and gone to the Opera and supped at the Savoy, by way of a grand farewell to gilded halls of splendour, and had found themselves alone in the great comfortable bedroom suite at Charing Cross, that panic of

the untried which is so coarsely thought ridiculous in the virgin male, and so sentimentally called exquisite in his mate, seized upon Martin, and mingled grotesquely with his true and ardent longing for high and pure romance. Miserably he felt that poltroonery was neutralizing knightliness. His sturdy sincerity helped him. He did most truly wish to offer his lovely lady a white and stainless fire of love. He was conscious that there were fires in him that were not so white ; that her beauty was extreme enough to fling him into the heart of these. Could one climb back on to the heights ? He remembered the blunting of all future exquisite approach that that first night of passion had seemed to both of them. Shelley was so far from being willingly a Circe that she was all too boldly his. She saw the abandonment of the body both as sacrament and as pagan beauty. It was sacrilege to fear her, except in alternative to grosser sacrilege. All this, mixed hopelessly with fear of the untried, spoiled Martin's wedding-day. It is not usual to represent such hours as ever less than blissful : one may question whether they are ever wholly so ; and Shelley sat like a mermaid, combing her bright hair —alone.

Her bridegroom, in the next room to her, was clenching and unclenching miserable hands. No peaceful vigil of knightly prayer, this torment. Yet he prayed, desperately.

“ If I am a fool, show me that I am ! Help me not to spoil it, whatever happens. Help her not to loathe

me. Fool. I am a fool. Oh, God ! and I thought this day would be the day of all our lives."

The night wore on, and still he agonized. Then, suddenly, the key turned in his mental prison. A sound from the next room, soft, unmistakable, broke down the walls for him. Shelley was sobbing to herself.

Martin made two wild bounds across his room and hers. She lay, divinely piteous and forsaken, in a pool of her bright hair. He rushed to her, knelt down by her and caught her to him as if he saw her drowning there before him.

"Fool, brute, idiot, donkey, beast, ass, *fool!* " he said.

"Thank you, darling," said Shelley, the tears still running down her cheeks. They clung to one another with wild laughter—laughter that did not last. . . .

## CHAPTER XIV

IT is a queer fact that fundamental differences separate the married less than superficial. We are not (if we are wise) for ever sounding the depths. Being "bound in shallows," it is the little crabs that pinch our toes, while Leviathan, beyond our pool, lashes the oceans sky-high unheeded. A woman may abhor her husband because he calls Bournemouth "Boo-urn-mouth," whereas she calls it "Bornm'th." A man may feel like murder over the irritating timbre of his wife's sneeze.

There was a fundamental difference, among many as fundamental agreements, between Martin and his wife. He had a certain shamefaced attitude to passion, and a dread that it desecrated love and derogated from its object's high worshipfulness. It faintly puzzled him that Shelley should play Helen rather than Beatrice. This tinged all their relation with an uneasiness that struck on Shelley's pride like a blasphemy. Coarser than the wildest abandonment it seemed to her, this fear of love. She could have embraced her lover in a church and felt no sense of sacrilege. He told himself that he was an ungrateful beast, that she was wasted on him, ardent though he was. Below the surface was

a faint “superior” feeling that he fought with all his might. Was his ideal perhaps higher, after all, than hers? Why did she serve the senses with violet-scented hair and filmy clothes? Once on their honeymoon they had come back from a theatre to a light supper in their private sitting-room at the hotel. Shelley had thrown her cloak off, let her shining hair loose over her exquisite bare shoulders, torn a rose-wreath from a hat and wreathed her head with it and pledged him in champagne with a Bacchante wildness. The appeal of her white breast and flashing glances had made his young blood burn in his veins. He had clasped her and carried her off like any cave-man. . . . The reaction from such a scene always brought shame with it—to him. To Shelley it brought nothing of the kind. He thought her quite unconscious of his mood, and deeply resented both the mood and her unconsciousness. She seemed freer, more joyous, more full of enthusiastic gratitude to Heaven, every time she had—tempted him. For the life of him he could not withhold the word. But in their ordinary daylight intercourse, each thought and gesture and intonation of hers was perfect to him, soothed his every nerve. Her loveliness, the finish of her dress, the readiness of her soft manner to every one they met, her constant thought of him that quite escaped an irritating solicitude, her physical untiredness that matched his own, the concord of their minds, all made her the queen of comrades. The difference remained mostly out of sight, submerged in health and sunlight and the open air.

What Martin did not guess was that it tortured her. She felt it an unimaginable insult. In her highest moments, married physical love was sacramental. In her lowest, it was part of the exhilarating joy of youth and health and lyric rapture, clearly God-given. To cherish a reluctance, a dishonouring inhibition, seemed to her ingratitude to earth and Heaven, besides the wound to her own pride in her great beauty. Shelley knew each smallest reservation in her bridegroom. That is the penalty of understanding: it blocks up every cranny of escape. To set Martin free, to let the fire she kindled burn blithely without shame, became her one obsession where he was concerned. It was a crumpled rose-leaf, with a thorn attached, in all their happiness.

A sort of crisis came one day. They had been lent, for the week-end, a bungalow in a private wood—a bungalow with a bathing-pool. It was to be a final joyous couple of days before the strenuous life. Both had had enough of theatres and feasting. They were, after all, both country-bred, soon surfeited of towns. The weather was divine, the woods divine. No human eye was on them. Shelley grew riotous with sheer vitality. So did Martin. They climbed the trees, Shelley an adorable stripling, her skirt discarded for forest-green breeches that gave her the air of a cross between a wood-elf and a Principal Boy. Hers was never an entirely unsophisticated charm. She was Rosalind, but never Audrey.

On the hot afternoon of Sunday Martin collapsed,

after a sort of Boy Scout morning of puerile adventure. He lay on his back, and the degeneration of his deep breathing into an unmistakable snore drove Shelley away.

“ Poor lamb, he *shan’t* be tenderly watched while he’s snoring ! ” she thought. “ I know how I should hate it. *Do* I snore ? How awful, if Paolo and Francesca had gone away together for some ‘ historic lover ’ night, and Francesca had deafened Paolo with her snores ! Don’t see how one can help it. Reminds me of that thing in one of Gissing’s books. Didn’t he say the spot on a girl’s chin at a ball, the one night when she might have got her wish, ought to be given its true place as the destroyer of her happiness ? We *are* materialists, the best of us ! A spot would put *me* off a bit—at first. I feel it would. Martin and I never have such things. . . .

“ How cool the pool looks ! Shall I dip again ? I will. I won’t go in and fetch my bathing-dress. The hut door creaks enough to wake the Seven Sleepers. I’ll just slip off these things and slip in like a water-rat. Go on snoring just a leetle longer, dearest.”

She slipped her skirt and jersey off, and stood, slim and erect, in her green breeches and her white silk vest.

She gave a hurried peep at Martin’s feet. They stuck out, reassuringly immobile, from a clump of bracken.

“ Are you safe, Mr. Burke, dearie ? I wouldn’t shock your modesty for all the world.”

She slipped the vest and breeches to her feet, stepped out of them, and dived. It was as near perfection as sensation ever gets, the silky coolness of the soft deep water on her sun-warmed body. She swam with slow long strokes, turned on her back and floated, tried paddling as a dog does and got her mouth full of water that tasted rather less delicious than it felt, spluttered a little and, by association, thought longingly of tea.

“ If only we’d engaged a dryad for the week-end ! Brownies would do. There ought to be a fairy-meal all waiting, with the sugar in an acorn-cup. But I feel like something on a rather grosser scale. Tea in a moog is my desire. Suppose I’d better get it. This is a good preparation for How the Poor Live. Hope it isn’t typical of all we’re going to do ! The poor cottager’s wife setting the table with a Buszard cake and China tea. Martin will think that cake worth waking up for. I know *I* should. Get out gingerly, Mrs. Burke, not to wake your pore husband, and put your good clothes on like a decent lady. Lucky we keep the towels hanging here ! ”

She pulled a towel from a bough and rubbed her shining limbs. Then a habit of her life was her undoing. For perhaps fifteen years Shelley had never dried herself without whistling. It had become a reflex action, completely automatic. A high, sweet note outsang the birds. She whistled :

“ Deh vieni, non tardar, o gioja bella ! ”

Her lover heard it. He woke, half startled, raised himself on his elbows, stumbled to his feet.

Shelley had dropped her towel. She had stooped, reaching for one slim stocking. The movement that he made arrested her. She stood, and looked at him.

He gazed at her, the whiteness of her, the softness and the grace, set in her frame of forest. For a long moment, Time had run back and fetched the Age of Gold. Man, in the Garden saw, for the first time, the woman God had given him.

Shelley flushed, tingling, virginal under his eyes. Then, by an instinct that she hardly understood, she bravely stood her ground. She held out tender arms to him.

*“ Martin ! ”*

*“ Shelley. Oh, Shelley, Shelley ! ”*

He came to her and caught her to him, kissing her shoulder and one warm, white arm, kissing her lips.

*“ What is one to do with you ? Kneel and say *Te Deums* ? Or carry you off to one’s wigwam like a brigand ? ”*

Ah, he was spoiling it ? Why must he speak, be literary, almost—kill the ardent moment, the one true bridal moment without reservations ? Shelley’s eyes filled with hot, resentful tears. She tried to draw herself out of his arms.

*“ Oh, Martin ! ”* she cried, a poignant cry that “stabbed his spirit broad awake,” *“ can’t you do both ? ”*

He understood at last, if but for a moment. It was, to her, their real bridal. His embrace was free, exultant, triumphing, a song of joy and thankfulness.

They were a man and his mate, naked and beautiful and fierce and pure, in a green world where mating is undefiled. The fair body of his love was a white flame to the young flame in his own veins. When they returned to prose and to what we in our wisdom call sanity, they were placid, they were unromantically hungry—but they were not ashamed: and Shelley was at last content.

## CHAPTER XV

“ **H**ERE’S a how-d’ye-doo ! ” said Martin.

It was the last day of their honeymoon. They felt the breath of the strenuous life stirring all round them, dispelling languors. After the song, the nest-building. And now the nest had failed them.

“ Read it out. Don’t tell it piecemeal,” said Shelley ; “ you’re like a breakfast-husband with ‘ The Daily Mail ’ already.”

Martin read it out :

“ DEAR MR. BURKE,

“ Your caretaker woman was removed to the Fever Hospital yesterday. Your house is vomiting sulphur and smelling to heaven of brown paper. Better come to us for a week till it’s ready. That doesn’t compromise you, you know, or make you pose as a dutiful son of the Church ! I hear you lump us with Boy Scouts. No, it was the Salvation Army. I don’t mind. The parish mostly lump us with the man who comes round for the gas-money. I can’t make you comfortable, but I understand you don’t mind. It will be an excitement to have you and to see your lovely wife. I meant to write to her, but my husband

says *you* are the 'responsible householder.' Rather early days to dowdify you, but of course that's what you are. What time will you come? Can you eat kippers?

"Yours,

"ALISON MAY.

"P.S.—Oh, I am the Vicar's wife, over the way from you. I met your nice mother when she took the house."

"What a lamb she sounds!" said Shelley; "her name is lovely too. Martin! I scent a dreaded rival. Only pretty women write like that. How long do you give me before I start poisoning her kippers?"

"Blasphemy is barred," said Martin, "but I'm sorry about the little 'ome, aren't *you*? I shall look for everything to come out in spots, however much they fumigate. Do you think we'd better go there?"

"We're going there," said Shelley firmly. "I will never desert that Dutch dresser your mother put into the living-room. Doesn't 'living room' sound sweet? We'll really live in it. No frills or parlours."

"Well, you'll be sorry when you gaze upon my scarlet corpse. However. . . . What shall I say to Alison May?"

"You're making songs about her already! . . . Let's wire. 'Most grateful. Coming to-morrow, 6.30,

for week. Martin and Shelley Burke.' Doesn't 'Shelley Burke' sound married!"

"How do you know we can arrive at 6.30?"

"We'll arrive any old time before that, and have tea in town. I hanker for one more gilded hall before the kippers start. Let's do ourselves proud at Rumpelmayer's, and then make a long nose at Piccadilly Circus and tramp East with noble, fixed expressions on our faces."

"Oh, all right." Martin was still young enough to regard cream buns as one of the temptations of the flesh.

At Rumpelmayer's, a chubby youth, seated alone at a table, started dramatically when Shelley came in. He threw at Martin a look of anguish and reproach, and fixed a gaze of concentrated longing upon Shelley.

"Goodness, it's Billy," said Shelley, "he's coming over here."

Billy came.

"I thought you wouldn't mind my congratulating you," he said, in the voice which would have suited a condolence with a bereaved young mother.

"How kind!" murmured Shelley. "Martin, this is Sir William Fordyce. He's often stayed with us."

"Too often," Billy said sepulchrally.

"I can't think of the right answer to that," said Shelley. "Were the sheets damp, or what?"

"The pillow-case was damp—damp with my tears," said Billy. The faintest twinkle crept into his eye.

" I hope you know that you are the best hated man in London ? " He turned to Martin.

" You aren't thinking I'm Smillie or anyone ? " Martin inquired anxiously.

" Martin, you *are* unflattering ! You don't realize that you've married the face that wrecked a thousand ships a *bit*, does he, Billy ? "

" If he doesn't," Billy answered, " my address is 14(A) The Albany. Forgive me. I hear mine own mountain goat bleating aloft."

A girl in a blue chiffon frock was coming in. She was a very pretty girl, and she blushed and smiled at Billy, and kissed her hand to Shelley.

" Why, it's Marion ! " cried Shelley. " You don't mean to say she's your own mountain goat ? "

" Going after tea to buy the ring," admitted Billy, a grin gradually irradiating his gloom.

" Well, I can only hope my vanity will survive this blow ! " said Shelley. " *Have you told her, Billy ?* "

" I wouldn't insult her intelligence by labouring the obvious. The two men who have stayed at the Palace *without* being turned down have both been tested for strong glasses since."

" Oh, go to—Marion ! Seriously, Billy, you *are* lucky. You will both be happy. She is adorable. Tell her so from me, and I'll tell her what I think of you before we leave."

The two couples plunged into *brioches*, with occasional beams in one another's direction.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Burke!" said pretty Marion when the four met after tea; "there's some chance for us all now!"

The Burkes were smiling to themselves as they walked down St. James's Street. Martin felt himself a bit of a conqueror, and Shelley enjoyed her little testimonial and, to do her justice, was genuinely relieved at Billy's consolation.

"That's our last touch with the giddy world of fashion!" she declared; "now for Alison May and Huldruth Street (who was Huldruth?), and kippers and a mangle. Eastward Ho!"

Huldruth Street, when at last they came to it, was rather disappointingly like most streets down which you take a short cut from the place you live in to the places where your friends live. It had respectability in every window in a glazed pot, pink or green. Its doorsteps gleamed, its knockers shone, its curtains bristled with clear starching. Shelley regarded it with bitterness.

"I didn't mean to begin criticizing my mother-in-law for at least six months," she said, "but the dear soul hasn't the remotest gift for choosing a good slum! Where are the fierce men lounging round the public-houses? Where are the slovenly women fighting each other with broken bottles? Do you call those children starving or neglected? I never saw such clean pinnafores in my life! Mine was *never* clean like that. Martin! This street is for Superior Persons. How could she?"

"Cheer up, here's somebody squiffy," said Martin. A jovial lady was lying just inside the railing of a building lot that broke the little tidy line of houses. Her legs, in dubiously white stockings, stuck out sturdily. Her bonnet, trimmed with purple pansies, was awry. She smiled at them.

Shelley cheered visibly.

"What an old pet!" she said. "Let's help her up! The police may come along and take her up, mayn't they?"

Martin stooped down and put a hand under each arm-pit of the lady.

"I'm sure you'll be comfier lying down at home," he said with a vivid blush.

"Bless you, dearie, kiss me!" said the lady, falling flatter than before.

Shelley suppressed a peal of laughter.

"You haven't the professional touch a bit," she said, "let me have a try!"

By this time quite an audience had gathered, principally under ten, but with a gaping youth or two and a voluble matron hastening to join it.

"Now then, mother!" said Shelley valiantly, "you don't want the police along bothering you, do you? Heave—ho!" She tried a vigorous lift.

"You 'is young lady?" The crone seemed reaping an æsthetic joy in regarding her ornamental rescuers.

"Yes, that's who I am. You can kiss him if you want to—but *do* get up!"

"Get up when the lidy tell yer, Mrs. Trudgecombe! Don't y'hear the lidy tell yer to git *hup*?" the audience cried.

Mrs. Trudgecombe rose to her feet with quite surprising ease.

"No one can't touch me, ducky, thank you all the same," she said, displaying a shilling clutched in one huge hand. "I got me bed-money—see?"

"What's—?" began Martin.

"Oh, that's all right! Sorry!" said Shelley, hurrying him away.

"Don't let's begin by showing our crass ignorance. I expect they can't arrest you unless you're a vagrant, wherever you choose to have your nap. The shilling's your 'visible means,' don't you see?"

"That may be it. Well, anyhow she's reconciled you to our street. That's something. Where's this Vicarage?"

They looked around them for the gables and the ivy that a Vicarage should put forth to justify its name.

"Can you tell me where St. Luke's Vicarage is?" asked Shelley of some dozen children who had followed her in a rapture of curiosity.

All the children fled with shrieks of laughter.

"What an uncomfortably strong sense of humour! Let's find the nearest shop and ask."

There was a shop that sold novelettes, Gold Flake, firewood and little hard pink sweets, "quite handy," as Shelley said. The shopkeeper looked bored,

" 'Fraid I couldn't tell you,'" she replied.

A customer entered with a push-chair on which a baby sat uncomplainingly smothered beneath a mighty balloon of "washing."

"St. Luke's!" exclaimed the customer. "'Ere's the Vicarage, next door like! Miss Black's *Chapel*, that's 'ow it is she wouldn't know."

The Vicarage turned out to be two of the little houses joined in one. Martin gave a rat-tat and Shelley gave a ring.

The door was opened by a small person in a striped blouse like a peppermint stick. She had an enormous species of chignon, and a smile to warm a wayfarer.

"It's *them*!" she threw over her shoulder.

"Jove!" said a pleasant feminine voice. The hostess came out quickly into the tiny hall.

"Come right in!" she said, stretching a kind hand to each. "Have you had tea at Christian-hours? Or are you ready for kippers and toast with us?"

"Oh, what a pity!" said Shelley. "We've spoilt it, and had tea at Rumpelmayer's!"

"The Ladies of St. James's.' Good old Rumpelmayer's! What a glimpse of Bond Street and the Park you both are. Waterbrooks. The hart, and all that."

"My wife is a little elliptical in her conversation occasionally," explained the Vicar. He stood concealed behind his wife's surprising length, and disclosed

himself as a nice pink soap-baby of a little chubby man.

Alison May was delightful, but comically unlike the Burke forecast. She was a loosely built, extravagantly tall woman. Her neck was long and rather thin, and her head and face so small that they added to her height. The face had a little the look of a charming tortoise. Its lines, all humorous and kind and clever, were too many for her apparent age. Her features were too small to match her inches. Her thick, untidy masses of flaxen hair hardly found room upon her head. The whole effect of her was altogether individual and strongly human. Martin and Shelley beamed upon her in grateful appreciation.

"Some day," continued Mrs. May, "I will wash my face and go to lunch at the Ritz. I will then go to a stall at a theatre, tea at Rumpelmayer's, then to Kate Reilly's for an evening frock, then to the Carlton for dinner, then to another theatre, in a box this time, then to supper at the Savoy, then to Murray's—then to a suite, *with* bathroom, at the Piccadilly for the night. We can sell the home next day. Here the home always means the furniture. A woman told me yesterday the 'ome was in the ware'us. I'm talking rather much. *You talk !*"

"You aren't. May we be there to see ? "

"Perhaps. I'm not quite sure. It might take off from the nice adventuress feeling—"

The Vicar coughed a little.

"Alison, dear—perhaps Mrs. Burke would like to see her room ? "

"Would you? You shall. We'll leave our men to smoke, while *we* have a cigarette up there. Or don't you smoke?"

"I do, worse luck! It *is* a slavery. I wish I didn't."

"It's worse for me. Down here it means—the worst. I simply daren't let anyone see me. It's probably no good. Gladys of course knows the guilty secret. She's loyal enough, poor little soul, but I hardly think she could keep such a thing to herself. You see, we had a living in Mayfair before we came here. That's how I got these Fast Set habits."

"*Had* you? But what a terrific going to extremes!"

"Yes, I like extremes. Now, here's your room."

It was a really nice one, modern and uncrowded. Shelley decided that this week would be quite bearable. Both women produced cigarettes.

"Smoking's quite dowdy now," said Shelley, "no one ever notices it. I knew people only had to go calmly on, and it would get quite ordinary. It's so with everything. It was with bicycling, wasn't it?"

"Good heavens, yes! I can remember men on knife-board buses leaning over the sides, and yah-ing hard when I rode through the traffic. Now, there's not an old knife-board left in all the town, and hardly a woman bicycling, except here and there. 'Ochone! when I used to be young'!"

"Do tell me why you left Mayfair!"

"Sealskin," said Alison May, "it smothers you. Powder and scent and gush. Half the women are feverish and the other half are comatose. I wanted some live people, and, as I told you, I love extremes. So we came here."

"I suppose they're a tremendous contrast?"

"My dear, the extraordinary thing is that they're so much alike! There's plush instead of sealskin and White Rose instead of—whatever you use. Very few live people. A little occasional violence when there's drink in them. A good deal of small thieving; nothing interesting—except here and there a person. And Mayfair had *that*."

"It sounds dull," said Shelley disappointedly.

"It isn't really—" Mrs. May hesitated.

"I'm glad you've come," she said, "you're beautiful enough to 'stab their spirits broad awake' for a moment. Beauty is a living force anywhere. There are one or two people here you'll be a joy to—beginning with ourselves. That husband of yours is a wonderful-looking creature too. You must let me paint you both. Oh yes, I paint—pretty average badly, but I've exhibited, and so forth. You must see St. Augustine and St. Clare. They'll love you."

"I thought it was St. Francis?"

"With St. Clare? It was. But this man's *called* Augustine. He's a curate—not a stage one—and our greatest friend. He's a tormented soul, rather. A lovable, queer man . . . attractive. St. Clare's a little

darling, a mixture of pixy and angel. You'll adore each other."

"Good heavens!" said Shelley, "you call this neighbourhood *dull*! I've never met fascinating souls in torment or pixy-angels anywhere."

"Dare say you have: they stand out against this background more. Besides, it may be our unwholesome concentration on them that makes us think so much of them. They're literally the only folk who talk our tongue within a mile or so. Of course we batten on each other's souls. It's a bit unhealthy, I dare say. On the other hand, every one's wonderful when you get to know him well. I dare say my Mayfair creatures were. I let myself be put off too soon, because I couldn't breathe. Let's go down. Don't change out of that vision of a garment. It rests my eyes to see you, and I want you to dazzle St Augustine. He's kippering with us at seven."

They went down together.

St. Augustine had arrived. He was leaning forward in a chair, a pair of burning, very large and deep-set eyes fixed upon Martin. When the two women entered, he unfolded graceful lengths as he got up. Shelley found her hand taken in a warm, magnetic clasp that did not last too long but left a faint sensation behind it.

"A personality certainly," she thought, "he might be overpowering."

The kippers turned out to be a very creditable dinner of potato soup, steak and kidney pie and apricot jam roll. Shelley was half relieved, half disappointed.

"Am I *never* to get away from shameful luxury?" she asked. "Look at this apricot roll! We thought you were a woman of honour who said kippers and *meant* kippers! And here we are fed on the fat of the land!"

"When you expected the lean of the sea? Kippers were symbolic when I wrote," said Mrs. May, "but they aren't always, I assure you! All the days of abstinence, for instance. You nearly begin to think you're a herring yourself, you assimilate so many."

"Days of abstinence?" said Martin, "this is a High Church parish then?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Mr. May, "mine is a Catholic church."

"Church of England, though?"

"I belong to the Catholic Church *in* England," said Mr. May with some disapproval.

"You draw a distinction? But is there a real difference?"

"All the difference in the world," put in Mrs. May; "there *is* only a distinction, now, between us and the Romans—the long 'A.' They're Cahtholics and go to Mahss: we're Catholics and go to Mass. Both of us hate fish!"

"Dear Alison," said Mr. May earnestly, "you know well that the difference—the essential *difference*, passing all distinctions—is that we are not subject to the 'infallible' authority of the Pope, and do not recognize the Italian Mission as the Church in this country."

"Who *is* your authority, really?" asked Martin.

"Do have some cheese," said Mr. May. "I can recommend this brand. It comes from one little place in Brittany, and one only. They are wonderfully good, my friends, in keeping me supplied."

## CHAPTER XVI

**S**ENSITIVENESS to environment is a queer and arbitrary thing. You will meet a man who has spent years at a Public School and then at a crack college at one of the Universities. He will have passed through both as unscathed as the Children in the Furnace. Tradition, custom, accent, appearance—all will be as they would have been if he had stayed in Little Peddlington. The exact reverse will happen with another man. Give him a week of novel circumstance, and he is an altered creature.

Shelley felt, after her mere hour or so of London Vale, that her whole earlier life had fallen away. The Palace was a dream. Her honeymoon, with its ardours and problems, was no longer in the foreground. Her world had become curiously narrow and intense. She looked forward with excitement to a winter in which she would see the Mays and "St Augustine," intimately, constantly. They seemed a small, beleaguered, compulsorily sympathetic, profoundly interesting group. The figure of a girl was in the background, mysterious and alluring, with an allure quite untraditional—not sexless but apart. Shelley had felt a certain reservation in Mrs. May's voice when she

spoke of "St Clare." It had affection in it, but a kind of stress—it intrigued Shelley. Already the concerns of these new human beings had begun to unfold subtleties. The quietness of the younger priest at table, his intense consciousness of every passing current, the silent convulsion of his big shoulders when a word amused him, the mystery of his eyes, with their expression of inward conflict and the bitter lines around his mouth ; the sudden change in the whole face when it melted into the most ordinary merriment and kindness—all made him an intriguing personality. Shelley began to be conscious that Martin, whom she adored, Mrs. May, who was delightful and original, and Mr. May, who exuded uprightness and careful kindness, had all receded from her consciousness. The protagonists in her immediate life were the young—or youngish—priest, the shadowy girl she had not seen, and, in some quite undefined way, herself ; and all this in an hour or two !

"Tell me their names !" she said to Mrs. May. The two had left the three men after coffee, and were smoking by the open window of the pretty little drawing-room, which discreetly looked on a small scrap of garden and not upon the more censorious street.

"First of all, what is St. Clare called ?" Some instinct made her put the lesser question first.

"St. Clare is Molly Cairns. You'll see her soon. We stray in and out of one another's houses."

"How old is she—about, I mean ?"

"Well, I've lost count. But so has Time. Molly's

body is like the bodies of the saints. It simply does not change. She looks a little girl. She gets addressed as 'Missy' and 'My dear.' She is a woman—still a young one: over thirty, though!"

In Shelley's world, "over thirty" meant considerably less than in a lower social stratum. Still, to Sweet-and-twenty, it brought a curious relief.

"How idiotic!" she thought. "What *can* it matter?"

"And what is St. Augustine's name?"

"He is Augustine Fairfax—Father Augustine to the Mission Chapel and to most of the Parish, 'that Mr. Fairfax' to the set that disapprove of 'Popish ways,' and Gussie to his sisters, to his great disgust. No, they don't live here, but they come here sometimes. Father Augustine is technically my husband's curate. As a matter of fact, we all exist in his shadow—or in his beams, whichever way you like to have it."

"He certainly does not suggest a curate!"

"Nor do most curates, if it comes to that."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Shelley. "I'm an authority on curates. You forget what generations of them stayed with us. I got to know every solitary variety. I was amused just now when Martin asked for information about your husband's position—his Church's, I mean. There's not a shade of it I haven't had expounded to me. Anglo-Catholic, just Roman without the Pope: very High Church, that just draws the line at the avowed Confessional: moderate High Church, that gives midday Communion every

Sunday under protest, and makes up for it by 7 o'clock services on saints' days : the ordinary British mixture where most people feel most at home—a cross on the altar, but not a crucifix ; a procession in surplices, but not in vestments ; talks in the vestry, but not confessionals ; large, soft handshakes from the Vicar ; and the offertory plate held high in the air as if it were a Monstrance. That's the kind one found in half the churches where Daddy held Confirmations. I used to go with him wherever he went."

" How did you like his ' going over,' if it isn't a sore subject ? "

" Why, I knew he would ! " said Shelley. " He'd tried the other things and it was this one's turn. He's still got Quakerism to go through. I bet you anything he'll be a Quaker next ! "

" You make him out a weathercock ! "

" Yes ; but he only answers to the winds of truth. Whenever he sees truth he has to follow it. We believe, Martin and I, that all the Christian religions are right, and some of the others. One might just as well stay where one is, or belong to none. But Daddy's not like that. A kind of revelation of the truth in one of them blinds him to the truth in all the rest. When he's run through the lot, he'll probably fetch up just where he started."

" He gave up a big position to prove his sincerity. One respects him for that."

" Oh, big positions bore us badly. Honestly, they do. I'd hate to have so little money that I could never

have anyone to a meal, and always had to wear cotton gloves and 'artificial silk' things. Short of that, the less 'position' you have to drag about with you, the better."

"Yes, I agree with you; but if people have never had it they are likely to overrate the fun of it."

"Perhaps," said Shelley gently. "Poor woman," she thought, "I wonder if she has always had a very narrow life? She has a look of distinction, with all her dowdy dressing."

Mrs. May gave a sudden laugh. Shelley flushed a little. There was an uncanny sensitiveness in this house's atmosphere. Every one's mind appeared somehow to impinge on everybody else's. Had her hostess read her patronizing thoughts?

"Is Father Augustine married?" she asked suddenly, wrenching away the talk from its uncomfortable lines.

"No." Mrs. May's mouth shut in a straight line. She looked at Shelley and hesitated. "Here they come," she said with some relief.

The three men came in together, Martin leading. His type impressed his bride as never before, seen isolated, as it were, in vivid contrast with his two companions. Next to the bitter lines and sunken eyes of the equally striking and not so greatly senior Fairfax, and the chubby nonentity of Mr. May's rubicundities, he had his Phœbus aspect strongly accentuated. With his white forehead and the slightly curly hair with the dash of gold in it, his schoolboy smile and step, he

was almost blatantly the allegorical figure of Youth itself. His eyes were usually on Shelley when he entered any room that held her. Now they kept turning to the stooping, sombre man behind him.

"That man will magnetise us all," Shelley thought uneasily. Then Fairfax gave a smile that cleared his face to absolute serenity and friendliness. "Rubbish. He's a perfectly amiable, normal creature," she concluded.

He came over to her sofa, and with a murmured "May I?" sank down at her side and smoked in silence, seeing her cigarette. As they sat side by side, Shelley again suddenly became conscious of this man's shadowy companion. The absent woman, presenting no picture of herself to Shelley's mind, was there between them. Shelley had a sudden flash of insight.

"He is strongly conscious of me and of his impression on me," she decided, "and he cannot separate such an integral part of himself as his St. Clare from the rest of his personality. He is simply impressing her on me as well. How weird!" Being an open-air young person, less subtle than she thought herself, she felt a glow of modest pride at her psychological acuteness.

Meanwhile the other three were talking of their neighbours.

"What *do* they care for, then?" asked Martin. He was looking disappointed.

"Money. Drink. Betting. Their food. Babies,"

said Mrs. May. "I should say that was the proper order."

"Do they come to your church?"

"Some of the women do. Here and there a man. The boys do, through the Boys' Brigade and the choir. Mostly, my husband preaches to empty benches. When this man preaches, they sit up and take notice." Mrs. May smiled at Augustine Fairfax. "It's chiefly because he shows them such contempt that it piques them. You ought to hear him say 'Beloved'! It sounds like a bite."

"You don't sound a very tender shepherd!" said Shelley, half turning round to face him.

He smiled at her but did not answer. She smiled back confusedly. Her long experience of every kind of clerical male, even her social self-possession curiously failed her with this man, whose attraction, though all masculine, was only half the ordinary appeal of masculinity to women. What the other half could be intrigued her.

"It's only fair to say," continued Mrs. May, "that he's quite different with his old folk at the Mission. They adore him."

"*They* are different," said Augustine, "they are the salt of the earth, some of the old folk there. They shame you." His face again cleared, grew benignant. Shelley again felt the lifting of an oppressive charm. She looked at him with ease and pleasure. Then a tenseness came into his eyes. He lifted his head slightly, listening.

“Molly!” he said to Mrs. May.

No one in the room had heard a sound. But now a curiously light footstep came in at the garden door; a girl walked up the three steps leading to the room and in at the French window.

Shelley looked up eagerly. It seemed to her that she had been tensely waiting for this coming. Her first feeling was disappointment and astonishment. The girl with her back turned, bending down to kiss her hostess, was indistinguishable from a thousand other girls in navy serge and black straw hats, from factory hands to Duchesses’ daughters. As she half turned towards the room, the factory hand predominated.

“What a profile!” thought cameo-featured Shelley.

Then the girl turned round to face her. A slim brown hand shot out and took her own.

“You’ve actually *come*!” said Molly Cairns.

Shelley found an extraordinary fleeting sense of comfort in the touch of the girl’s hand. A volume might be written about handshakes. Molly’s was the unmistakable touch of a friend. It was kind, it was faithful, it was enthusiastic without gush. Solomon’s woman, in whom her husband’s heart could safely trust, must have shaken hands like that. Shelley looked up into a pair of good and beautiful brown eyes. From that moment Molly entered her life and settled down in it, as securely as the sunshine. You may not see the sun, or even greatly miss it, in

this country, but you never change your feeling towards it for an instant.

"Oo-er!" continued Molly, "isn't she *lovely*, Alison? It'll be something new for us to have a fairy princess in Huldruth Street! We shan't mind if it rains. You won't just vanish, will you? You'll give us a fair trial? We'll 'behave'!"

"So far from vanishing," said Shelley, "I feel as if there were no other world outside already."

This was true and meant to please; but three out of the six people in the room exchanged quick, scared glances.

"Oughtn't one to feel like that?" said Shelley quickly.

Molly sat down upon a table.

"Well," she said slowly, "it's a little bit what's wrong with all of us already. We looked forward to you two as a sort of . . . ventilating shaft—a window into a wider world. You see, we're a kind of beleaguered garrison."

"And all your emotions suffer intensive culture," suggested Shelley.

The others looked at her in some surprise. This beauty had brains, then. She could feel the thought that passed between them.

"I expect that's it," said Mrs. May, in a brisk impersonal way that sheered off embarrassing topics.

Shelley looked at Augustine Fairfax. His face had quite relaxed into the genial lines that made it sweeter

but more ordinary. It struck Shelley that the warm simplicity of Molly's actual presence, the real serenity of her soul, put an end to restlessness—while she was present. In her absence, perhaps, she would become again the mysterious influence. Her eyes looked softly, candidly, at each of her friends in turn. When they rested on Augustine, there was no troubled change. There, at any rate, as in her Clytie brow with its black waves of hair, her beauty equalled Shelley's. No eyes in the world are lovelier than clear, brown, peat-coloured pools with a fringe of long black lashes above and below them. Add a loving soul, and they become divine.

"What a darling!" Shelley thought. Her life seemed rounded, all in a moment. With Martin for love and passion, Molly for friendship, Augustine and Mrs. May for interest, she felt extraordinarily complete. All tension had vanished from the atmosphere. Every one lay back as he sat, except Molly Cairns, who curled herself upon a cushion on the floor, hugged her slim knees, and openly watched Shelley and Martin alternately, smiling when either of them caught her eye with such a naïve pleasure in their beauty that both were conscious of a strong desire to kiss her.

"How's the burglar's baby?" asked Alison.

"She's rather adorable," said Molly; "the burglar's very popular with all my children. He comes in and makes rabbits out of the most unspeakable handkerchief you ever saw. He's been in a pantomime, too,

and does a lovely buck and shot, whistling all the time."

"What *is* a buck and shot?" asked Shelley.

"Like this." Molly got on her feet in one soft movement. She performed something vaguely like a clog-dance, with quick steps, whistling shrilly to a rag-time tune.

"We all do it now from morning till night," she explained.

"What a festive family!" said Martin. "What do you do the rest of the time?"

"Other dancing, recitation, singing, piano, literature, and pious attendance at all the little stunts Father Augustine gets up in the church," said Molly, "and every year we have a Mystery play in the church itself. You have to stand up to see the performers. Every one who is old enough to walk insists on having a part."

"What *do* you run—a school?"

"Heaven knows! A sort of mixture of crèche and dramatic academy and convent, I suppose. I'm going to give it up. I don't believe it does a scrap of good."

"Oh, no!" said Augustine, "kiddies who used to spend their days dodging school and watching street-fights aren't a scrap the better for living with you and getting to care for all your interests. Naturally not."

"Well, you're very kind," said Molly. "I'll go on in hope, then. As a matter of fact, I have to! I

haven't a notion how to stop the thing. It just *goes* on of itself. Fresh people turn up every day with Gladyses and Mabels, and one takes them on. There's no excuse for turning them away."

"Do you make them pay?"

"Oh, yes, when they can. I make a good thing out of the day school side. Some day they'll break my windows for profiteering."

As the Mays and Augustine snorted at this point, both Burkes decided that Molly was not to be taken "at the foot of the letter."

"I'd love to see your place!" said Shelley.

"Good heavens, you'll see it!" exclaimed Molly, "we all spend hours in one another's houses. I don't know how we get a thing done besides talking!"

"How jolly!"

And, curiously, it seemed so.

"If you'd told me," Shelley said that night, "that I should look forward quite with thrills to being shut up with a parson and parson's wife and a curate and a philanthropic young woman—'me, that have been where *I've* been,' especially where *curates* come in—I'd have advised you to find a more convincing lie. What *is* it about this set that fascinates you?"

"Goodwill and brains mixed up, I think. I feel about them just the same as you do. Of course we've no one to compare with them. Perhaps every one's interesting, isolated. You generally can't see the wood for the trees."

"That may be it. Would you say the Augustine person had goodwill?"

"I dunno," said Martin vaguely. "What eyes Miss Cairns has!"

## CHAPTER XVII

MARTIN and Shelley came down to breakfast the next morning, extraordinarily braced. Let a honeymoon be never so successful, the first day of normal life is still bound to come as a relief.

Mrs. May stretched out a long, vague hand as they came in. Her eyes were fixed upon the inside half of a newspaper. Her long, amusing mouth was full of toast. Mr. May took upon himself the duties of a host—more, of a hostess. He displayed some agitation.

“ Alison, dear, has the bread-knife been destroyed ? ”

“ Mass-meeting of fifty thousand unemployed got nasty,” replied Alison ! “ Bread-knife ? No. What’s the matter with the knife that’s there ? ”

“ It is the *carving*-knife, Alison ! ” Mr. May’s voice trembled almost into tears.

“ Let it carve bread for a change,” his wife suggested absently. “ Did you think Clynes would ever ‘ incite to violence ’ ? I expect he wants to conciliate the extreme lot. . . . Oh, what is the matter ? Still that blessed knife ? I put it to those present—what’s in a name ? If you have a large, clean, sharpened knife to cut the bread with, *does* it matter if it hasn’t ‘ bread-

knife' written on its handle? I couldn't find the bread-knife, but it's *somewhere*, naturally. No one takes the bread-knife out for walks."

Murmuring discontent, her husband left the room in search of the bread-knife. Unfortunately, he took the carving-knife with him. Mrs. May rose like a flash, rapidly cut the whole loaf in slices with an ordinary knife, and dived again into the paper.

"Do you hate snippets read to you?" she asked. "I do. But I love reading them. I never can make out if it means a sweet nature, bursting with sympathy, or a conceited nature, vain of having knowledge a minute ahead of every one else. You'd better order papers for yourselves while you are here. If I have to give you mine or talk pleasantly to you at breakfast, I shall hate the very sight of you!"

"For God's sake go on reading!" said Shelley and Martin together. They opened some letters that were forwarded from the Burke home.

The Vicar trotted in, triumphant, with the bread-knife.

"I always think," he stated, to a somewhat inattentive audience, "that if a utensil is *made* for a special purpose it is much better to *use* it for that purpose. Let me cut you some bread. Oh, I see you have some!" He seemed a shade crest-fallen.

"I shall want some more," said Shelley hastily. "I've nearly done my piece."

"I hope you will speak when you are ready." He

gave a little courteous bow across the table. Shelley returned it, feeling very "old-world" and charming. She liked the little ceremonious man.

Mr. May dived into the half-paper by his plate, with many apologies and offers of it to his guests. While he read, his small eyes roved the table anxiously. Once he got up, went round the room and pushed his wife's cup farther from the edge.

"I think that is a position of greater safety," he said with gentle satisfaction.

He smiled at both the Burkes. They both smiled back.

"Like some toast?" asked Alison abruptly.

"Oh, thank you——" began Shelley.

"Make some, then!" her hostess muttered, deeper in the Albert Hall than ever.

Martin gave a suppressed whinny of delight.

"Here, I'll do it!" Alison exclaimed. She was sitting with her back to the unlit gas-fire. Wheeling round in her chair, she lit the fire, transfixed a piece of bread upon the sacred bread-knife itself, stood the knife upon its wooden tail, with the bread half an inch from the bars, turned to the table and began again to read, reaching a heel behind her to discourage slipping on the bread-knife's part.

Shelley and Martin watched her with fascinated eyes.

"It's burning!" whispered Shelley delightedly.

Mr. May gave a convulsive leap from his chair, rescued the bread, scraped it, and settled down to toast it.

"If it is passed gently to and fro across the surface of the fire," he pointed out, "the heat is equably distributed and the toast does not run so much risk of being burnt in one place and remaining untouched in another."

This was incontestable; but the process seemed a slow one. All desire for toast was leaving Shelley. When the piece was finished, however, and presented with much deference, she accepted it with gratitude, and felt that a small episode had satisfactorily closed.

"What interesting lives they both must have!" she thought. "Every moment of the day brings something that Mr. May thinks quite important, and brick walls do not a prison make for Mrs. May. That's evident."

After breakfast—a time which one associates with much domestic stress in most housewifely lives—Alison May settled herself and her two guests in wicker arm-chairs in the sunny drawing-room and cast her considerable length upon a sofa, exposing beautiful arched feet in shabby shoes of the dancing sandal type.

"Now, let's discuss your plans!" she said. "What do you want to do with yourselves in this good parish?"

"Oh, dear, we haven't thought it out!" said Shelley. "Can't you put us on to something fairly useful?"

"Oh, you're in the vague still, are you? Better

talk to Father Augustine—he'll be here directly. He may start you. If you don't get started, I can see what you will do: just settle down and talk and talk, all day and half the night, as I do, and think of nothing but three households—Molly's, Augustine's and ours. It's fatal, I can tell you! I can never be sure if we waste our lives, or if we've just eliminated all the things that other people waste them on."

"But surely Miss Cairns has a full enough life?"

"Good heavens, yes! So has Augustine. They work their heads off in the parish, in their own weird ways. But they have niches. They compromised themselves at the outset. You're free lances—and I'm a sort of bull in a china-shop. We've tried detached outsiders before now. They either go or else they get entangled with our lives and hurt themselves when they have to break away."

"I can imagine that," said Martin. It was already unthinkable that anyone could leave Huldruth Street as one might leave Grosvenor Square. There would surely be some torn soul-tissue left behind upon invisible barbed wire.

"Well," said Shelley, "the idea was roughly—wasn't it, Martin?—that we were to live upon about half our income (it's not very much) and spend the rest in something that would make a real change in some poor place."

"That's about it," said Martin, "but I'm rather keen on something else as well. I thought if I could learn a trade, and live among the men who ran it, I

might get to know conditions better, and see where the shoe really pinched."

"Well, we might see." Alison seemed doubtful. "Meanwhile, what about just giving a hand, here and there and everywhere, and getting to know your world?"

"Y-es," said Martin. It was a natural weakness that made him feel the rôle of unauthorized district visitor, as it were, less glorious and interesting than that of the dazzling young innovator who introduced unheard-of joys into dull lives.

"What was your notion?" asked Alison again acutely.

"Well——" He hesitated, and looked at Shelley. "Don't you think a gorgeously attractive Temperance Pub would do the trick to start with? You know the sort of thing they generally are. Kind ladies meet you and shake hands and hope you'll feel at home, and all that sort of thing. We wouldn't have a touch of that. Our notion was to leave the men alone entirely. There'd be no harm that they *could* do. We'd have attractive drinks—not only coffee—but no alcohol. We'd run a billiard-room, and reading-room, a room where they could dance and bring their women, a lantern-lecture room with really jolly people to address them; there'd be a room for only men—and all the rest would be open to the sweethearts and wives. There'd be one of us sort of near at hand, in case of any row—but nothing that looked like supervision or interference. What do you think of it?"

"It has its points," said Alison thoughtfully. "We'll see what Father Augustine thinks. I expect it'll depend enormously on which set takes it up. If you get the rowdies, you'll not get the other kind—and vice versa."

"I'd like to get the lowest, if I could."

"Well, it would be huge fun to try! I'd like to see a novelty in the Vale." Alison began to catch his enthusiasm.

Shelley clapped her hands.

"Do let's go out and look for a site!"

"Molly's pub would be the very thing, if she really meant to give it up. But one never knows if it's a burden to her or if she'd be lost without it. Anyhow, we can't very well turn out the boys and girls who board there. The day-children could come here, if she liked. I have a garret that would make a cosy school-room. It runs the whole length of the house."

"Oh, we mustn't turn out Miss Cairns!" said Martin hastily. "Surely there's a building of some sort we could get hold of. Won't it be a rag!"

"I'm afraid you'll be the rag before you're done," said Alison. "This parish isn't ferocious, except now and then—but it *is* apathetic, my God!"

"Never mind," said Martin, "perhaps we'll have luck, and hit on a ferocious streak! I love something to bite on."

"The Church Militant," said Alison. "Did you ever think of Holy Orders, by the way?"

"Think of it? Yes. I don't believe the collar

would fit me. I won't turn mine round until I find I'm still less good without it."

"No, don't," said Alison, with sudden urgency.

Both wondered a little at it. Then their thoughts flew past the rubicund, disarming Vicar and fastened on the strange, old-young figure who towered above him in their minds as in the flesh.

"Perhaps the collar galls," thought Shelley, "yet one can't imagine him a layman, quite."

The wearer of the collar sauntered in. It is a peculiarity of the over-worked that they singularly seldom bustle.

"These children of light want to set up a Temperance Pub," explained Alison. "How do you think it would work?"

"Temperance Pub? Cocoa and tracts?"

"No!" roared the children of light, and expounded.

"I like the idea," said Augustine, reflecting. "It couldn't do much harm. And it would exasperate Mr. Carter. I should like to see Mr. Carter a little exasperated. Yes."

"Who's Mr. Carter?"

"Carter," said Augustine, "is one of my lambs. He is the most foul-mouthed, cold-hearted, unmitigated blackguard that I have ever had the pleasure of downing and outing. We got his licence suspended, I'm thankful to say. Your Pub will be the last straw on his iniquitous back."

"Let brotherly love continue!" remarked Shelley.

" You are looking 'sinister.' I always wondered how people did it. Now I know."

Augustine laughed, and looked anything but "sinister."

" Please tell me every time," he said. " It would be an awfully novelettish thing to look. Next thing to wincing or bridling."

" That's quite easy!" said Shelley. " To wince, you just bite your lip a little, half close your eyes and draw in your breath with a gentle hiss. When you bridle, you draw yourself up with a little jerk. Poultry do it, if you cluck at them. You know how they get taller every minute, in little jerks."

All four began at once to wince and bridle. The sun shone into the room.

" When the applause has a little died down," suggested Martin, " I vote we go on talking of my Temperance Pub. When can I have it?"

" There's a little too much 'I' about our young friend Burke," said Shelley. " It's *my* Temperance Pub as well, I understand?"

" Why labour the obvious? Where can we find a house for *our* Temperance Pub—hereinafter alluded to as the T.P.?"

" Oh, goodness knows!" said Augustine. " We'd better get some loyal but obscure parishioner to go nosing round. They've settled it already that you two are the Idle Rich. You'd get rooked as sure as a gun. And if one of us went round the whole plan

would get out before you want it to, and you'd give the opposite side time to organize."

"Let it!" said Martin. "Personally, I'd like the thing advertised up and down every street. No holes or corners about our T.P. It's to attract the curious till we've got 'em all in."

"What do you expect to *do* with it?" Augustine watched him as we watch two kittens boxing.

"Oh, give them a little fun, if I can; and pick up a little knowledge of their lives from them, once I've got them."

"That's the spirit!" said Alison approvingly. "I was afraid you had high-brow hopes of elevating them with the sight of your clean cuffs and Mrs. Burke's *coiffure*."

"My cuffs be—dirtied!" cried Martin. "But I jolly well do think Shelley's hair would do some elevating anywhere! It did to me, anyway!"

"Lamb and idiot," said Shelley, "there's better hair than mine in any parish. This very day I saw a flapper with the most gorgeous rope of gold. She went by the dining-room window when we were at breakfast, on the other side of the street. She was tall, too, and rather nicely dressed. I thought she was the prettiest thing I'd seen for days."

"Was she in green?" Alison asked quickly.

"Yes—a good green, too; and green's an awful trap, unless you get the quite right shade. She'd got it."

Augustine looked at Mrs. May and she at him.

"Another mystery!" thought Shelley. "Why did I ever think that out-of-the-way parishes were backwaters? Here already is a local villain, who may be Dangerous, and a mysterious beauty and an Inscrutable Man and an adorable girl and a most original host and hostess and a Forlorn Hope, apparently. Nobody seems to think our nice Pub will redeem the world!"

"That girl," said Alison, with portent, "is the Parish Problem. And it's largely this man's fault."

"Heavens!" said Shelley. "Don't tell me anything you'd rather not, Father Augustine!"

He laughed, but with uneasiness.

"I meant well," he said reproachfully to Alison.

"As bad as that!" said Shelley. "May I have the story, please?"

"There really isn't one——" he was beginning.

"*I'll* tell it you!" broke in Mrs. May. She evidently had no inhibitions as to this side of her friend's experience. It belonged to no region like the surmised relation with Miss Cairns, into which one feared to rush.

"Katie Carter——"

"How cacophonous! I've made it worse! Cacophonous Katie——"

"Will *you* continue or shall I?"

Shelley made a motion of sewing up her lovely lips. Augustine Fairfax gazed at her in a rapture so openly æsthetic that she nearly laughed aloud.

"It is jolly to be *quite* so pretty!" she thought fleetingly. "Gives you confidence." You wanted confidence with Fairfaxes. They otherwise confused you a little, as when you are suddenly addressed in a foreign language which you know imperfectly.

"Katie Carter," resumed Alison firmly, "was an ordinary pretty publican's daughter——"

"Never seen an ordinary pretty publican."

"When this man came here. She had an eye for every man she met, like many other pretty girls, more power to them! Up till then, she had only been thrown with men of her own class. This man here considered her a pearl on a dung-hill. She was really a cockle-shell, no pearl, but her shimmer is misleading, I admit. She's clever, in her way—the sort of 'Man and Superman' way that only serves sex-ends. She didn't waylay him with the ordinary lures. She consulted him about her soul. He grew profoundly interested, had long talks with her——"

"I'm going," said Augustine, uncoiling and stalking off. "Venomous female! If there's such a thing as a sensible man in the house I'll go and talk to it."

"And really took no end of trouble," continued Mrs. May, untroubled. "You see, he thought it was a desecration of her, living in that beastly house with that beastly father. Like many other subtle men of the world Augustine has curiously innocent streaks. (So glad he's gone!) He was not in the very least hypocritical in taking an interest in Katie's soul. Of

course, what Katie took an interest in was—different. Augustine may have half suspected this. He's human, and it may have added to his zeal. At any rate, he installed her as his secretary. One met her at tea in his drawing-room, and shook hands and called her 'Miss Carter' and all that. No harm in that. But when her father really got outrageous and we had to get his licence suspended, he raged like a bull of Bashan—and bethought him of Katie. Before we knew where we were, he was brawling in front of Augustine's house in the middle of the night. 'Give me out me daughter you——' and a few kind words to that effect. His daughter, naturally, was under his own roof at the time. Well, a policeman strolled up and dispersed the worthy Carter. The neighbourhood knows him pretty well, and there was not so very much harm done. Augustine insisted on keeping her on. Said it would only give colour to nonsense if he sacked her just at that time. We rather agreed. What we hadn't reckoned on, although we had misgivings, was Miss Katie's self. She started wearing a small ring and being mysterious and arch about it. Half the parish started smiling at Augustine and giving gentle hints and so forth. He was only bored, but we knew it meant mischief. The upstart was, I soon discovered, that the wretched child had given out all round the place that she and Augustine were engaged ! ”

“ Good gracious ! ” said Shelley. She could hardly, even in imagination, couple the stately man of mystery

with the fluffy publican's daughter she had seen that morning mincing past her window.

"Well, of course," said Alison, "democratically (and insincerely) speaking, there was no real just cause or impediment why it shouldn't have been true. Katie was, and is, I believe, a perfectly virtuous girl in the technical sense. She is over the average pretty, speaks very nicely, and dresses, as you saw, like any girl of decent class you like. The point is that Augustine didn't happen to be engaged to her or to dream of becoming so."

"How did he get out of it?"

"He bearded the minx in his study—without witnesses, unluckily. We told him one of us had better be there, myself for choice. He said it was bad enough to have to humiliate a pretty girl, and he certainly was not going to do it in public. So he tried, with the natural result. Katie fled to his arms, and wept there! Poor Augustine! It was hard for him in at least two ways. She really is uncommonly pretty! He had to keep himself in hand and do a lot of shoulder-patting and the strong paternal stunt, to get her soothed. Then she turned really dangerous. She made out—plaintively, always: Katie has nothing of the shrew in her—that she'd been compromised in her father's bar by talk of what he'd done, and that the little ring was to make the other girls spread about among their menfolk that he 'meant fairly' by her. It was immensely pathetic, if one didn't *know* she was a minx!"

“ What did Father Augustine say to that ? ”

“ Oh, laughed it off. Thanked her for the compliment, and said he wasn’t marrying anyone—meant much too ‘ fairly ’ by them for that—and he advised her to tell the girls she’d just been fooling them for a joke ; then she’d have the laugh of them for being so credulous. Poor Katie saw the game was up, and she followed his advice. After a time she got another job and the talk died down.”

“ Poor girl ! ” said Shelley absently. “ I can’t imagine him engaged,” she said, a moment later.

“ Well, he was ! ” said Alison. “ You’re sure to hear, so you’d better hear it from me.”

Shelley was disproportionately astounded.

“ I thought he’d never left this parish for years and years ! ”

“ He hasn’t.”

“ Well, I thought there was no one here except ourselves.”

Alison smiled at the last word.

“ You’ve soon assimilated us,” she said affectionately.

“ It *is* cheek, I know ; but nobody could help it. But tell me ! ”

“ Well—who constitutes ‘ ourselves ’ ? ”

“ Why, you and Mr. May, and Father Augustine and Mol—Miss Cairns.”

“ Exactly.”

“ Well, he’s not engaged to her ! ”

“ Not now.”

“ You don’t mean that he was ! ”

“ For just about a month. You mustn’t ask me why they broke it off. If you have the intuition that I think you have, you’ll gather that as time goes on. In any case, it won’t go into plain English. That is why the parish can’t be told, and why it talks of nothing else. You can put all ordinary ‘ mysteries ’ out of your beautiful head. Both Molly and Augustine are *compos mentis* and able-bodied and all that. And they haven’t got ancestors or near relations in prisons or lunatic asylums. You said just now, ‘ I can’t imagine him engaged.’ Yet he’s a ‘ fine man ’ and most attractive. Why did you say it ? ”

“ I don’t know, quite. I shall know, a little later, I dare say.”

“ This is a haunt of delicious mystery ! ” thought Shelley.

Before she slept that night, the plot had thickened. She had left her sponge in the bathroom and she wanted it. Cautiously opening her bedroom door, she stole along the passage in pyjamas. As she groped for the sponge in the dark bathroom (Huldredth Street did not boast electric light) she could not help overhearing a voice of real agony.

“ Darling Wife, for pity’s sake—for *pity*’s sake,” it said, “ you *will* find Horace ! If you *knew* how I cannot do my work, do *anything* . . . ! ”

“ Yes, yes, we’ll find him,” said the soothing voice of Alison.

“ Martin,” said Shelley, standing on his chest, “ the

Mays have a son called Horace—and he's *lost!*"

" You'll smash my breastbone. Hop it!" squealed her bridegroom.

Shelley hopped it.

## CHAPTER XVIII

NEXT morning, Shelley regarded the benignant wrinkles on her hostess's brow and searched for the signs of a seared and aching heart, but found none. Her curiosity as to Horace grew intense. Surely no normal woman could keep placidity, with a man she evidently cared about in such an agony as Mr. May's poor pleading had shown ! She turned to him in sympathy, and again felt baffled. Mr. May was assimilating sausage with the zeal of a Savonarola. "Recollection," in the Catholic sense, was evident in him.

Later, Shelley got the clue.

"Horace is *found*," said Mrs. May. She kept her eyes upon the "Daily News." Shelley got the impression that the missing lad's whereabouts were advertised in that meritorious sheet, among the announcements of Grave Labour Crises.

"Good, dear," said Mr. May, munching steadily and almost sacramentally.

"Here he is, you see." And the extraordinary woman pushed along a toasting fork until it entered her husband's sleeve and slightly pricked his wrist.

Mr. May shook it out a shade impatiently.

"Thank you, dear," he said, with so almost imperceptible a shade of irony that Shelley respected him. "It is a great relief to me."

"Is that—*thing*—Horace?" Shelley asked.

"That's Horace," mumbled Alison. "Listen to this: 'Mr Lloyd George, speaking on the results of the by-election—'"

"Mrs. May," said Shelley, "I thought Horace was a son you'd lost. I couldn't help hearing Mr. May last night. I nearly wept for him."

Alison burst into one of her incongruously schoolboyish peals.

"Bless him!" she said.

"Why 'Horace'?"

"Because he came to us from Horace Cecil. We have a fool way of calling all our wedding-presents by the names of the people who gave them. The teapot is Queen Alexandra, and the cruets are Dr. Moberly and my napkin ring is Old Jane, and so forth. It's idiotically confusing to outsiders; but it does make you feel surrounded by friends!"

Shelley laughed; but one name remained in her mind. The teapot was from Queen Alexandra. Alison had obviously blurted out that name, not noticing. Who was Mrs. May? A gradual sense of having seen the queer, delightful face before, in the papers if not in the flesh, grew upon Shelley.

"Yet *another* mystery!" she thought.

The very next day she solved it. Among a pile of faded newspapers, she came upon a "Graphic" some

years old. Turning the pages with the interest that the most superior among us show in portraits, she saw before her at the top of one page two medallion photographs, very fairly reproduced.

“Lady Alison May and her husband,” she read, and underneath the heading was a paragraph.

“The marriage of the Earl of Kenworth’s daughter with the incumbent of St Jude’s, Mayfair, caused great surprise, some years ago, the bride having long been famous for her love of hunting and all that appertains to horses and the open air. Mr. and Lady Alison May have now decided to leave Mayfair for a parish in which ‘more stark reality,’ to quote Lady Alison, may be encountered. We wish them all success in their strenuous undertaking: we understand that the new parish is in a part of London in which the law is more honoured in the breach than the observance, and in which the pair will have few friends of the class to which they have been accustomed.”

“Good heavens, what a fool I am!” thought Shelley. “Alison Willard, of *course*! Why, Daddy must have met her! He raved about her riding. I remember perfectly his talking of her disappearance into London clergydom, and wondering how it was. I must say. . . .” She reflected on the slightly stolid charms of little Mr. May.

“*J'accuse!*!” she cried, taking the “Graphic” to Alison.

Alison coloured slightly. Then she looked full at Shelley, with her disarming boyish grin.

"Guilty!" she said, "but I don't see what it proves?"

"It proves that you're a Delicious Enigma," said Shelley, "and that's a most refreshing thing to be in a blatantly obvious world. Do you know, I've felt for the last day or two that I had seen you somewhere? It must have been your picture in the papers when you came to this place. It was after looking at them, I remember, that Daddy told me all about you. You were the hardest rider in your county, and you'd refused half the men you knew, and every one was surprised at your marrying a clergyman—especially a London one. I *am* impertinent!"

"You are most pertinent," said Alison, "that's all quite true, except the refusing clause. Most of the males in our county were infants or greybeards. The greybeards were all married and the infants didn't count. Every one else was refusing them all the time."

"How could you leave it all!" cried Shelley. She suddenly visualized the tall figure on the perfect mount, heard the gay voices, smelt the scents of a Meet. So did Alison. For one moment, the two looked through the same window on the self-same scene. It was all but reflected in their regretful eyes. Then Alison gave a little laugh.

"Perhaps I got sick of it. Perhaps I got religion. Perhaps I fell in love. You takes your choice. I'll tell you some day."

"Do—when you really feel inclined," said Shelley softly. "May I tell Daddy, Lady Alison?"

"Don't call me that down here, if you don't mind," said Alison. "I dare say it was silly, dropping it; but as I *have* it would only make a muddle now if these folks knew. As a matter of fact, the slums are every bit as snobby—no more so and no less—as any other place. I expect it would have helped if I had kept it—such as it is."

"Wouldn't they have counted you as the Idle Rich and wanted to break your windows?"

"Only if I got up against them in some way. I never have."

"You don't think the B. R. will start in this parish then."

"The B. R.? Oh, the revolution. Well, it might. There *was* a sort of start last winter. It was a dreadful winter, you remember, and there was the Coal Strike and nearly a month of frost. We found out that they had a regular organization (small blame to them, poor devils) to loot every food-shop in the place. That might have led to anything, obviously."

"What happened?"

"Oh, the Government has a man here and there in all these places. They got the tip; and the landlord of this very street and several other streets came down himself and opened a great food-kitchen with free meals for the families of all the unemployed. Of course a good many of the disaffected employed got in as well and fattened. That was winked at. It soothed

the lot—as much because of the novelty as because of the food, I honestly believe! Anyhow, they cheered him when he went away. The Coal Strike broke up. The frost broke up—and the 'revolution' broke up too!"

"There are possibilities of seeing life down here," said Shelley.

"There's life to be seen everywhere," said Alison a little curtly. "If you've come to look on, you'd better go back—and go to a theatre or two."

Shelley got a little red.

"*Touchée!*" she said humbly. "You know I want to help; but I'm a feeble, inexperienced ass."

"And I'm an ill-mannered frump," said Alison. "Come along to luncheon."

Martin, at luncheon, was in a state of rapturous excitement. A building had been found for the Super-Pub. It was in a slummy street, just at a noisy corner. One mingled drawback and attraction was that it all but faced the *Dragon*; and the *Dragon* was the establishment of the worthy Mr. Carter, whose goodwill would in no sense of the word be benefited by such rivalry.

"You must expect as many squalls as Carter can raise," said Augustine. His hollow eyes glowed at the prospect. It was he who had chosen the place for the Super-Pub.

"The question is, can *we* raise the wind!" said Martin. "Shelley, are you prepared to live on bread and herring for the rest of your natural if we fail?"

Shelley nodded heroically.

“We won’t fail,” she stated.

“That’s the spirit!” said Alison approvingly.

Mr. May looked doubtful.

“Carter’s a nasty customer,” he said, “and Augustine loves a scrap.”

“They won’t shoot Shelley, will they?” asked Martin; “short of that, I feel rather ready for a fray. We’ll see what sheer obstinate goodwill can do. Funny how it works in all the legends! Wolves don’t bite you and fire doesn’t burn you. I’m not so sure in real life. We’ll try.”

“Modest little dear,” said Shelley, “comparing himself with St. Francis!”

“I didn’t mean to, honest Injun,” said Martin humbly. She gave him a comforting look that Augustine intercepted. A wistful expression softened his own face. Shelley wondered what his history was. Molly and he—why not? Surely a pair of mates. Why was it so unnatural to think of them as married? Marriages *were* queer. Look at Alison—and that little chubby man! She gazed at him—then glanced at Alison and found herself detected. Alison gave her odd, short bark of a laugh, and nodded at Shelley.

“Remind me to tell you something,” she said.

“These people read one’s thoughts all day,” thought Shelley. “I don’t know if I like it.”

“Mrs. May” tackled her that afternoon. The three men had gone out to the landlord of the Super-Pub-to-be.

"I saw you look at my old man," she said, "and think 'What *did* she see in him?' I'll tell you what I saw."

Shelley murmured apologies.

"Nonsense. Of course you did. I saw you. I felt like you myself at one time. Of course he's not the type we've thought of seriously, women like you and me. I'm not evening up our attractions, my dear! I'm a fright (just now, at any rate) and you're the loveliest human being I've ever set eyes on. But, roughly, we've met the same class of men. There were more curates in yours and more horsy men in mine. But there's been a sense of space and masculinity in my set, anyway. No one associated me with a London Parish!"

"I should think not!" said Shelley.

"Well, but—would you be surprised to hear that no one associated Robert May with one either? Oh, I know he looks the typical padre now, and messes about with little things and weeps about the toasting-fork, and all that! But when I knew him first he was a captain in a crack regiment! Fact. He went all through the Boer War; and when he came back he was changed. He wouldn't talk about it all, even to me; but one day he astonished me. He said: 'Can you imagine yourself a curate's wife, Alison? Could you put up with that sort of life—in town, too, without a horse, outside the buses?' (there weren't so many motors then) 'and probably on very little? My father will be furious if I leave the army, now that I'm getting on and have

been "mentioned": and I don't mean to live on *your* father, though I leave that part to you where your own expenses come in. Do you care enough to stick to me through all this?"

"What did you say?"

"Well, apparently I said, 'Put it there!' or words to that effect," said Alison. "Anyway, we had a good old argument at our respective homes, and melted delicately out of our respective circles. I fancy our people on both sides have half forgotten us. They don't feel that we're disgraced. The Church is respectable and all that. They simply don't understand how anyone can live in places like this. They wouldn't find it in a month. While we were in Mayfair they came around a good bit. That's another reason why we left. It was half-irritating, half-tantalizing, to be constantly tempted back. My father kept a hack for me in town. I found I couldn't ride *a little*. It had to be all or nothing."

"One's conscience *is* a nuisance!" sighed Shelley. "Look what it's done to Daddy!"

"I've heard as often of your 'Daddy' as you have heard of me," said Alison, "and once I met him. What a charmer! The marvel is you haven't had a wilderness of stepmamas."

"I should have if he hadn't always had a sort of kink of modesty and innocence! If Daddy had met Potiphar's wife he'd never have suspected she wasn't a 'nice cordial creature.' To the as-nice-as-that all women are 'nice'."

"It was a plucky thing to do, that giving up the Bishopric."

"Yes, bless him! The next plucky thing will be his giving up his monastery; for they're sure to want to keep him. He's a born monk—for the moment: that's my Daddy. I don't talk like this to every one—only to people who love him."

"Is it the artistic conscience, do you think?"

"No, I think it's the born soldier in the convinced pacifist. He must have opposition to give him an interest. We're all like that a little bit. That's why so many married couples who've never 'had a word' suddenly get separations, I suppose!"

"Wise child!" said Alison. "You're probably quite right. Where people only marry for the fun they hope to get out of it, it seems to me, their partner must soon get like yesterday's paper—just as full of intelligence, and looking perhaps quite as fresh; but they grabbed at it yesterday—and to-day they would rather have quite an inferior new one, *because* it's new. It's very natural."

"The self-denying ordinance," said Shelley. "It seems queer to think it could ever be self-denying, to live with the person who suits you best in all the world! And I can't understand why they shouldn't develop, and change with the times, till they seem more like to-morrow's paper than yesterday's. I hope one would oneself."

"That's the right idea," said Alison, "but there's no doubt at all that the most adorable fellow-creature is

bound to get on your nerves now and then, if you're boxed up with him for ever. The thing to do is to realize that it doesn't particularly matter if he does, a little, and that *you* probably get on his."

" You are consolation itself ! " said Shelley.

Alison laughed.

" You've a chance in a thousand. You're both children of radiance. A really beautiful person can make anything attractive. For instance, you never keep your hands still. If they were stubby and had warts, I should soon hate you for turning your wedding ring softly all the time we're talking. As it is, to look at your fingers is pleasant. Silly child, you needn't sit on them ! Seriously, it is the tiny tricks and sayings that gradually act like drops of water on a stone (what a bright new simile ! ). Robert used to tap his pipe out to a little tune. At first I used to smile tenderly whenever he did it. Then I used to move irritably. At last I turned and appealed hysterically. He was naturally astonished. ' Why didn't you say so before ? ' I believe it is better to ' say so ' with angels like Robert ; but some men might be made up of habits. If you kept ' saying so ' you'd grow into a first-class nagger."

" Well," said Shelley, " I'll look out for something to be irritable about in the Martin child, and bear it for his sake. Here he is, more by token, with your Christian warrior and Father Augustine. Do let's hear about our Pub ! "

The Pub, it seemed, was all that the heart of man could desire,

"Shelley," said Martin, "couldn't we let our nasty, spotty little house to some one else, and go and live there! It's the very place. There's a study for me, a parlour for you, and two ripping bedrooms and a room where you could put a bath, and a kitchen—everything we want as well as all the rooms the men would use! Couldn't we, do you think?"

"Sounds good," said Shelley, "but what about your dear Mamma? Think how clever she was, with her little Dutch dresser and those lovely yellow plates!"

"Have sense, woman," said her husband; "what's to prevent dressers and plates and things coming into our Pub?"

"Of course. Well, take me round to see it. A loaf of bread, a jug of temperance wine and thou . . ."

"It's anything but a wilderness! There's enough life under the windows to fit up half a dozen novelists. You'll love it."

"Now, listen to me!" said Alison. "First of all, I don't know—nor do you—that you have permission to sub-let your house. Secondly, that corner is nothing like so open or so decent as this street. Self-sacrifice is all very well; but do you want your lovely wife to lose her sleep and her complexion? Thirdly, your old house is just opposite *us*. I had flattered myself that that was an advantage. All I ask is—wait. Wait till you've had your tea, at any rate!"

Good sense carried the day. Martin, for Shelley's sake, reluctantly relinquished his idea of sleeping at the most brawling corner of the worst slum in the Vale;

and, when Alison suggested that there were little picturesque steps in the "old" house that led into a garden, Shelley at once had visions of delight, and only longed for the days of its purification to be completed.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE months rolled on. Martin and Shelley led a sort of dual life of intimacy and exile. So far as the poorer inhabitants of the Vale were concerned, they made vexatiously little headway. Martin's eager friendship and air of equality puzzled the men and made them suspicious. From the clergy they expected something of the sort, and counted it as a kind of excusable touting for spiritual custom. Martin was an excellent billiard-player. At parish shows he danced with gusto with everything female he could find, from beldames to flappers. He roared a comic song with the best. His attendances at church were erratic—and he had been seen coming out of a Wesleyan Love-Feast and a Catholic Low Mass. He was a very obvious "toff," and he asked every one's advice as to the trade he should take up, once his Super-Pub was started. People who openly missionized were understood. Martin seemed every man's disciple. The fear that he was some sort of secret Inspector died down. Then a prevailing idea that he was "a bit balmy" took its place. This was after he had suddenly preached a highly secular sermon after a street fight, during which one gladiator had pommelled the other

for some three good minutes after he was down. They waited for the opening of his "blarsted" coffee-shop with some distrust, some curiosity, and a little friendly pity.

"Jim Carter'll 'ave 'is knife into 'im," they prophesied with expectations distinctly pleasurable, though they liked Martin well enough, which is all only human nature.

Shelley got no farther with the woman and the children. The children called her "Miss" and stared at her, following her about and fleeing with wild giggles if she turned to speak to them. She had had visions of being a sort of fairy of the slums, and bade fair to be a freak instead, which wounded her heart but was bracing for her vanity. It is probable that if she had openly been the Beautiful Lady bearing Gifts she would have stood for romance to them and been adored. It was the anomaly of her perpetual lowering of 'erself that chilled them. Perhaps it was an inherently false position. Perhaps her Paquin dresses would have done for her what all her holland overalls failed to do. She was not even correct in her new social code. She gave grave scandal by leaving her front door open all day long, for instance. Was it not well known that only the low do that? If you respected yourself you kept your hall door shut, to show that you had the whole house. To serve tea to your guests with your sleeves tucked up, again—when the guests were Mrs. Tompson from the grocer's and her daughter—there was a solecism! Shelley, in fact,

was in danger of the amateur's pitfall—overacting. She grew more and more discouraged. Then, as the world outside three doors (her own, the Vicarage-door and Molly's) receded unsympathetically, the world inside grew tenser every day.

Gradually it seemed to Shelley as if London, with its Piccadilly Circus and its theatres and buses, were across some sea that had no traffic on it. It was incredible that half an hour would take her to the heart of it, that "the Vale" was nearer to it than Ranelagh had been, or Lord's, and considerably nearer than Henley. The little set were islanded in intimacy. They felt that access was somehow inhibited by their own reluctance. If it had been forbidden, they might have hankered for it. As it was, it took the shape of a neglected duty. Invitations would stray in now and then, to be more than half resented—and refused.

Shelley and Molly Cairns had become friends in a way supposed to be unattainable to women. They had little overt sentimentality in their intercourse, and their initial bond would have been rather a division in the usual world, for it was a common susceptibility to the personality of a man who attracted them both. Shelley found herself studying the moods and looks of Augustine Fairfax in a way that surprised herself in the character of Martin's bride. She felt, if anything, more deeply implicated with Martin every day that passed. She adored his beauty, loved his character and spoke his language. What was wanting, what

allowed her interest to focus itself upon another man, however cleanly and blamelessly? Alison gave her the clue. The two talked with an intimacy that the circumstances and general atmosphere fostered to surprising lengths.

"What you find in Augustine is mystery—not the ordinary sex-lure of novelty, but a quality outside yourself," said Alison. "Your marriage is a union of Narcissus. You are as nearly one, you and your husband, as Narcissus and his image in the stream. It is extraordinarily beautiful, and it will keep you free of all the vulgar dangers. You can never be jarred by him, any more than your ears will be offended by sounds you make yourself. Augustine is not you, nor me, nor any well-known type. He is a sponge for the absorption of other individualities, without the neutral quality of the sponge. He gives as much as he receives, in interest and in sympathy. It is because he never speaks of himself, because he seldom speaks at any length at all, because his face is so curiously expressive and yet withdrawn, because he has a sort of silent language that somehow reaches every one, because—oh, I don't know! Because he's so wildly unlike a blameless curate, though that is what he is after all, that he absorbs one. Anyone outside would think us just a set of unwholesomely brooding shut-in people, infatuated with probably ordinary human beings—until they knew Augustine. He 'tells' as much in any *milieu*, for I've seen him in a good many."

"You never seem drawn in as deep as we are," said

Shelley. She felt uneasy at her situation. It seemed somehow a slur upon her lovely marriage.

“ Dear Narcissus,” she thought fondly, “ I wouldn’t give one of your tight baby curls for any lanky curate’s body and bones and silly soul ! ” It was true. Yet she knew that it was not Martin’s face she watched when all the friends were together, or his voice she listened for. Life was strange !

“ If I feel this growing any stronger, I vote we move,” she thought ; “ it would be a horrid wrench, of course, but neither powers nor principalities shall weaken what binds Martin to me. There’s the Super-Pub, though ! That complicates things.”

The Super-Pub, indeed, was nearly “ there.” Martin, one night, addressed a crowded audience, himself seething with excitement, in the Grand Hall of it.

“ Now then,” he said, “ what do you think of your new Club ? Here’s this jolly big Hall for all our meetings, and the concerts and plays we’ll all get up together. We’ll have bigwigs, too, to lecture to us—not dull stuff, but things we choose ourselves, with lantern-slides.

“ Then you have an A 1 billiard-room—raised seats to hold a hundred, a good fire in the winter, and the best table we could get you. We’ll have a championship, with a money prize every year, and sometimes we’ll get a swagger pro. to give an exhibition.

“ Then the dance hall has a polished floor, chairs all round the walls and a gramophone you can hear a

street off ! Refreshments going all the time, cost price.

“ Then there’s our Coffee Room. Cosy chairs, smokes, drinks of every kind except the one. And I want to say a word about that.

“ I don’t for a moment hold that all drink is the devil and that those of us who drink are wicked and those of us who don’t are saints. What I think—don’t *you* ?—is that you’ve got to weigh the advantages of a thing against its disadvantages and act on what you get. The advantages of drink are that it makes one feel jolly and—I can’t think of anything else, but that’s a good big advantage, these hard days ! The disadvantages are that heaps of us can’t stop at just a little ; then the money goes, the home falls to pieces, the kiddies are born unsound or there’s nothing to spend on them to give them a chance, we quarrel with each other, we can’t keep work—then we can’t *get* work—oh, it’s too obvious for anything ! If I were a Temperance lecturer, I should just say, ‘ It’s a nuisance giving up the jolly thing, but, on the whole, it makes more trouble than it’s worth.’ That’s all.”

“ ‘Ow about your lyte dinners ? ” bawled a voice. “ Don’t you ‘ave your glass of wine right enough, Mister ? ”

“ Me ? Lord, no ! ” said Martin, easily. “ *I’d* be a fine figure of a boy, coming here and gassing about drink, if I swilled cushily at home myself ! ”

There was laughter at this, and the interruption did good rather than not.

"Then there's the reading-room, with all the papers—or, at least, not all—all we can run to. I thought perhaps you'd each agree to bring along a paper of some sort, when you had done with it. That's what I mean to do, and so does my wife. That reminds me, all the wives can use every room in the Club if they want to, except one small room where the men can get together and argue. There's another jolly little room where only ladies can sit together and talk about the babies, or the fashions." (Laughter—and a snort from Shelley.)

"I can't think of anything else. The question is—what are we going to charge?"

A rustle of uneasiness ran through the hall. Suspicion darkened half the faces.

"Now we're getting at it!" most of them expressed.

"It's awfully difficult to know," continued Martin, "we can't quite reckon what would make it possible to keep it up. My notion is that Mr. Jefferson should choose a Committee from amongst us all, and the Committee should settle what we ought to ask. I've started the show; but we shall every one of us use it, and we'll all have to pay something—hardly enough to count probably; much less than the Picture Palaces; anyhow, we'll settle that among ourselves. We'll choose a treasurer or auditor or something—the Committee will; and, if there's any profit over, we'll have a beano with it, a year from now."

Martin sat down.

There was a doubtful pause. Then, for the first

time since his coming to "the Vale," he got a round of applause. The obvious frankness of his voice and face in speaking on the ticklish subject of "expenses"; the charm of novelty and expectation as regarded the Super-Pub; above all, the appointment of Jefferson, a man more popular than any other in the district, melted the doubters. So far, the thing was a success.

Little Mr. May got up to speak, a mighty bunch of leaflets in his hand.

"Opening night is on Saturday next," he shouted genially, "take these home and tell your wives and all your children old enough." He threw the leaflets broadcast. They were caught with laughs and good-natured scrambling.

"That reminds me," Shelley cried out, suddenly springing to her feet, "we're not going to forget the children. There'll be no end of shows for them. We're planning them out, Mrs. May and Mrs. Jefferson and I. Do tell them."

Applause from the mothers.

Cheers, led by Jefferson, for the Super-Pub and all concerned in it. "God save the King"; and a hilarious resortment to the Vicarage by the Great Six.

"We've done it!" said Shelley, waltzing Molly and Alison wildly down the passage, her arm round both their waists.

"We've knocked 'em!" said Martin, glancing with reverence at Mr. May's less negotiable *tournure*.

Augustine drank in dumb show to the Super-Pub.

"Here is where your temperance principles slip up," he said. "I could do with a hefty Scotch."

"So could I," said Martin ruefully. "But it's no good, is it, riding the two horses? Puts one in a beastly awkward position when they begin to sit up and ask questions."

"Yes, you did score there, didn't you?" said Molly. "I'm sure they think of you with 'champagne-wine' before you every night. You know the general notion is that both of you are millionaires in your own right!"

"I wish to heaven we were! *Wouldn't* we just do things!"

"You'd shatter the whole show to bits, I have no doubt," Augustine said, "to mould it nearer to the heart's desire. The question is—whose heart's? Yours, or the people's?"

"Good God, man, we're the people, aren't we? You say yourselves that human nature's just the same, allowing for circs. Well, shouldn't *we* be glad if things were made more full of beauty and goodwill, without any beastly patronizing? It must be safe just to give them a little decent fun!"

"Well, nothing venture. Time will show. By the way, Carter took it very quietly, didn't he? I saw him at the back with his daughter."

"She wants to help us with the children's side," said Shelley. "I thought we'd let her."

"Why not?" said Martin. "She's an uncommonly good-looking girl. I was looking at her as we all came

out. She looks unhappy, somehow. I believe that father of hers bullies her."

There was a tiny pause.

"I wish she'd leave the place!" said Augustine suddenly. It was rare for him to speak explosively. Shelley looked up at him surprised.

"She's a little Mahomet's coffin, rather," Alison said, "suspended between two traditions and two classes. We're all prisoners, here, in a queer sort of way, but she's in solitary confinement. It's not her fault, but she can't fit in anywhere."

"What can she do?" asked Martin. "Can she type, for instance?"

"Oh, yes, quite decently," said Alison. "The trouble is she's sort of betwixt and between classes. That's our fault chiefly, I suppose. She's too ambitious, and not thorough enough. She thinks she knows—and that's the kind of mind that's hardest of all to teach. For instance, there was a paper that wanted me to do it a Household Hints column. I passed it on to Katie, thinking she'd give useful little tips of the sort I always want myself—how to put enough dripping in the frying-pan to keep the pan from burning, and not too much, so that your kipper oozes fat—all that sort of thing. But Katie has ambitions. She *would* be fashionable, and the result was quaint. I only remember two items. One was about colours in furniture, something like this: 'I was staying in a country-house last week—one of the Stately Homes of England—and I noticed that the walls of the living-

room were of a soft shade of blue, while each of the four bedrooms had its own pretty shade.' Can't you see the country-house? I expect four bedrooms and a 'living-room' make a sinfully luxurious picture to her, poor kiddy! I altered 'country-house' to 'cottage in the country' and gave the 'Stately Homes' a miss. She got very red and I felt a brute. Next week she began a very sensible Note about dry shampoo with 'Now that the inclemency of the weather has made the daily bath an impossibility . . .' When I found fault with that, she stared and said, 'But your kind often do have daily baths, don't they?' It was pretty hopeless. If she'd only written of the things that all housewives want to know, she might be earning her two pounds a week now, 'without leaving the home' as the advertisements say!"

"Poor little soul!" said Martin.

Augustine was swinging the blind-cord so that the tassel made sharp little taps against the window. It was as near to exasperated fidgeting that Shelley had ever known him get, so far. Probably the fair Katie was a source of some remorse to him.

"It's generally fatal for a man to 'mean well' to a pretty girl," she reflected.

"I tell you what," said Martin, "I shall want a sort of secretary for the Super-Pub, once we get really going. I mean to cast my net wide for all sorts of big bugs to come and speak and sing and lecture. Couldn't Miss Katie (I forgot her name) come with her type-writer (has she got one?) and settle in that tiny room

behind the bar? You won't want to be for ever writing appeals, Shelley—nor shall I. Don't you think that's a ripping idea?" He looked from one face to another.

The Mays and Augustine looked more than dubious. Shelley felt uneasy, but her vanity was roused. It was rather early days to fear the contact of her husband of a few months with any Venus of the slums. Besides, it was an insult to Martin's loyalty and love. All the same, if the Mays objected strongly—she glanced at them.

"I should do nothing of the sort—" began Mr. May.

Alison cut in, with a little frown.

"You might employ her sometimes, whenever there's a press of writing," she said casually. "I shouldn't install her as a fixture. There mightn't be much work and you would have her on your conscience. Besides, it might prevent her from taking a better paid job."

"That's true," said Martin, rather dashed. "I'll speak to her about it, anyhow."

And there it rested.

## CHAPTER XX

YOU who have read so far—does it jar on your idea of the infinite delicacy and faithfulness of real love, romantic love, that a bride should have a thought to spare from her bridegroom, a few months from their wedding-day?

It seems to me that chroniclers refuse to face all facts that do not help ideals. These are, perhaps, the sorrier facts. Ignoring does not kill them. One such fact is that possession frees the senses, after the first rapture. They are as likely to be affected from outside the charmed circle as they were before the marriage. To say that this implies no stability of love, no faithful affection, no recurrent mood of passion—to say, indeed, that it implies anything of essential importance to the pair, is foolishness. A little time ago, a novelist dared to show a bride of some weeks, in the arms of her bridegroom, and thrilled by a stray thought of a man who had met her in the street that day and looked her in the eyes in passing. If all such sensations are wanton, then the world is wanton, for such is the world. The more fastidious the subject, the more delicate the lure required. Shelley would have “thrust out the lip” at any overt love-advance from any man but her young

husband. The half-unconscious encroachments of an atmosphere (for it was hardly more than that) that made the appeal of Augustine Fairfax were disturbing to her. It puzzled her that she should be susceptible to his mere presence in the room. The little "garrison" would perhaps be talking, desultorily and lazily. Augustine would stray in. At the sound of his hat thrown on the table in the hall, every one would stir, and grow, as it were, fixed, for the moment, like a dog "pointing." Shelley would find herself talking for effect, noticing his movements, feeling her cheeks burn and her eyes shine.

"Good heavens!" she would think impatiently. "Am I a flapper, fluttered by the male? I!" But there it was.

Martin appeared to notice nothing. He, too, was to some degree under a spell. Molly Cairns, with her sweet eyes that dwelt on him so frankly and so softly, was his loadstone. He found himself listening for her voice, smiling when she smiled, feeling, in her shabby, cosy room, as if in sanctuary. Together, the two had a cult of Shelley that never allowed him for an instant to feel the faintest fear. They would dwell upon her beauty, tell loving anecdotes of her. . . . It was inconceivably unlike "flirtation." The fact remains that if Molly had worn spectacles the talks would have been far less frequent. Augustine would often join them, looking at neither, sunk in a deep chair, his eyes, too, sunk in their sockets, smoking eternally, now and then sitting up, with a horrid screech of wicker, as an

argument galvanized him into speech. Shelley had not, apparently, seduced him as far as an inch from his strange and fruitless devotion. Yet that he was conscious, in her presence, of her beauty and his own effect on her, was obvious to a sensitive observer.

Alison was a shade disturbed.

"I rather hope," she said to her Vicar, "that Molly and Augustine won't get up soul-entanglements with our Children of Light! They're capable of it, without meaning to. As it is, Shelley listens for his footstep, and Martin watches the window for hers. Oh, heavens, yes! They each adore their own mate—and Molly and Augustine are to be trusted. I should hope we know that by this time! It only strikes one that the Children haven't had the fairest chance, quite. They should have been allowed to concentrate on one another longer, either alone or in the ordinary crowd they lived in. Our little set is like a party that's just too small for any *tête-à-tête*. One doesn't want the mystery rubbed off so soon—or perhaps transferred. . . . After all, Martin is obvious as the sunshine. Augustine isn't. Shelley may feel that."

"My dear, you can't dry-nurse them. They are less in any real danger than any pair I've ever met."

"What do you call real danger? Material, physical?"

"I simply mean that they are clean of body, and loyal of soul."

"I know. But soul-loyalty's as delicate as a pair of

white kid gloves. You can mark it by only shaking hands."

"Well, life isn't going to keep white gloves on—I'm getting mixed. If you have nothing worse to grouse about——"

"Grouse!"

He smiled affectionately at her and left her.

Alison was worried—less at the cause she had adduced than at a cruder one.

When Martin had suggested engaging Katie Carter as the secretary of the Super-Pub and its concerns, she had carefully not opposed the notion, for fear of giving it a glamour. Also, she felt that the signal failure of poor Katie and her parent in Augustine's case should have made for safety in Martin's, leaving the *beaux yeux* of Shelley and Molly out of the question altogether. As events were turning out, she did not feel so safe. Katie had been ensconced in a small room behind the bar for some weeks now. There was a new demureness in her glance, a new blue wing in her best hat. Her father went about with a kind of sly, ferocious smile, that dwelt on Martin with a "Fee, fo, fum!" implication that was disturbing. It seemed but little he could do; but had they helped him to that little by planting an explosive ready to his hand? His daughter's presence in the enemy's midst was all he could have asked. Could he make use of it?

Alison did not fear the girl herself. It is a curious fact that crude, honest directness of purpose baldly shown is only not chilling in great love. Where a mere

sex attraction is concerned, it almost invariably repels. Katie was entirely primitive in her desires. "A sailor in a hurry would be charmed," some one had once brutally said of her. A man who could feel the spell of Molly's sheer absence of deliberate allure would hardly yield to the "come hither!" in Katie's pretty, liquid eyes. It was not Martin's heart and senses or Katie's wiles that were a danger. It was the use that might be made of the position. Alison feared embarrassment and disillusion for her Child of Light. What came to him might have been worse than any such imagining.

Katie had, for some time, encouraged the attention of a young florist who, with his mother, kept a little shop of the humble kind that is hardly more than a stall at the side of a larger one. Every one felt relieved, until it became obvious that she wore the poor little man, as it were, as a decoration, and used him as a testimonial to her charm and as the source of offerings to Martin. Day after day, small, wilting bunches of votive flowers—poor victims of Love, laid twice upon his altar—tried to regain a languid freshness in a tumbler, upon Martin's table, in the little room behind the bar. So unconscious of any such homage was Martin that he thought it a pretty trait in the girl to care to surround herself so sedulously with tokens unlike the squalid corner where she lived. That the pathetic bouquets were, so to speak, aimed at his own unconscious face escaped him.

This did not please the huntress in poor Katie. One day, as Martin came in, he found her setting some

fatigued-looking roses in the glass. She lingered over the pretty job until he, naturally, made the sort of remark that one does make on such occasions.

"I'm glad you like them," said she softly, looking up at him with eyes of innocent worship. "I thought you were getting tired of those other kind."

"Grammar, young woman!" thought Martin. Then, disquieted, "Surely they're not for me?" he said.

"Of course they are. I bring them twice a week."

"Oh, I say, how good of you! You mustn't, though. The idea of your spending——" He stopped, and felt a fool. Of course, young Starkie gave them to the girl.

He tried a little chaff, which generally "went down" with the ladies of the Vale.

"Poor Mr. Starkie!" he said, rallying her.

Katie made the gesture known as "tossing" her pretty head.

"As if I'd *look* at *him*!" she muttered. Her glance said the rest.

"Shades of Adela! my fatal beauty again," thought Martin, with a heartless grin. He was too sensible not to know that women *were* attracted by his type, and too little fatuous to believe they could be serious. Shelley, beside whom he honestly thought himself "plain-headed," was a bracing influence against personal vanity. He did not feel that the fair Katie could be doing more than "keeping her hand in," but his common sense, helped by the memory of the Augustine episode, sounded danger-signals.

"Very unkind of you," he murmured absently, as if already tired of the subject. "*Have* you seen that bill of the glazier people, Miss Carter? I left it somewhere here."

Katie looked sharply at him, but there was no sensibility visible anywhere in his face to work upon. She abandoned the delicious danger-zone with a small sigh.

It was not from her directly, poor child, that danger threatened. Her father—the delectable Carter—had taken to hand-rubbing and obsequiousness ever since the opening of the Super-Pub. For Alison this held its omen. The rest were frankly relieved.

"Knows when he's had his claws clipped," was their verdict.

Such knowledge, when you are the clipper, does not endear you to the clipped. Alison watched the furtive gleam of hate that now and then escaped poor Carter's bloodshot eye.

"There's not much he can do," she thought; but this was before the domestication of Miss Katie.

Martin was by nature less suspicious than the average. Augustine was more so than most. Even his vigilance was off its guard, however—until one day he heard a growl not meant for him to hear.

"B——y kind of secretary," was what he heard, "in there with a married man of twenty-somethin' *with the door locked* 'alf the day."

The italics are Augustine's. So was the Happy Thought. He held short converse with a confidential carpenter; and one day, Martin and Katie being off the

premises, a certain change was made in the appearance of the "office" door. Martin, always unobservant of such things, was not aware of it.

The day came when, but for that carpenter and for Augustine, Martin would hardly be "our youngest Bishop" now.

It was a dusty, enervating evening, late in summer. Martin had dictated a few letters, chiefly to performers who might be found in town unoccupied and would not be above a visit to the Concert Hall for a modest consideration in the fee-line. Katie had bent her golden head with zealously and finished off the job with neatness, but with a languor that Martin noticed.

"You ought to get away into the country," he said sympathetically.

"What about *you*?" asked Katie, glad of the excuse to lift blue eyes to his.

"Oh, I expect we'll go next month! Anyhow, we've not been here as long as you have. When did you go last?"

"Not since last year," sighed Katie. "I don't mind, though. I'm used to it, like. That's what it is."

"Ah, but you oughtn't to be," Martin was beginning, when the key suddenly turned in the lock—outside.

Both stared at the door. Martin had got used to its appearance. Katie, for the first time, looked closer and seemed startled. Then a familiar howl was heard outside.

"Bring out me daughter, you— Whatyer doin' with me daughter?"

Katie's nerves gave way. She did the thing of all things that was nearly fatal. She shrieked wildly.

"Dad! Let me out! The door's locked! Let me out!" she screamed.

A crowd collected in a second.

"There! d'you 'ear 'er? Locked in, she is, pore gurl!"

"Be *quiet*!" Martin said, in a low voice, catching her wrist.

She sobered in a moment.

He thought quickly.

"Unlock that door!" he called.

"That's good! Unlock it yerself, you——" was the answer, which brought another scream from the wretched Katie.

Martin thought of the window. He pushed it up, and getting out upon the sill, measured the distance to the doorstep. With an oblique jump that nearly impaled him on the railings, he fell clear, and rushed into the house, collaring the worthy Carter, who was on his knees before the office keyhole.

"What's the meaning of this?" shouted Martin, for once beside himself with rage. "How dared you lock me in?"

Some lightning instinct made him say "me" and not "us."

Carter turned on him with such malignancy that Martin felt it like the smell of asafœtida.

"*That* won't wash!" he snarled. "I arsk you," he said, turning to the delighted crowd that grinned

behind him, " did you or did you not 'ear me daughter 'ollerin' to get aht ? ' Dad, let me aht ! ' she says— and all you 'eard it ! "

" That's roight ! " said more than one voice.

Then a tall figure, fingers hooked in cassock belt, strolled to the scene.

" Hullo, Carter, at it again ? " said Augustine. He looked down with amusement on the injured father ; then winked genially at the crowd.

Personality is personality. The public feeling veered a little.

" Now then—what's it about ? Here, Allen, you have sense. Tell me the story."

Allen, an amiable-looking lout, muttered a shame-faced version.

" Mr. Burke had locked the door of his office on himself and his secretary and she screamed to him to let her out ? "

" That's roight ! "

" Did she say, ' Mr. Burke, let me out ! ? ' "

" No, she says, ' Dad ! Dad ! the door's locked.' "

" I see. And it doesn't strike any of you that the door may have been locked on the *outside*, by ' Dad ' himself ? "

" That's good, that is ! " blustered Carter. " 'Oo's goin' to believe that ? "

" Well, I think we all are," said Augustine calmly, " considering that that particular door *doesn't lock on the inside*."

Sensation.

"Supposing," he went on, "we get poor Miss Carter out? She's had fright enough—unless she knows her father's little games. I don't want to drag her out of the window—so perhaps Mr. Carter will give me the key?"

"I like that—*me* give you—" Carter sidled towards Martin and the door.

Augustine was for once quick in his movements. As Carter's hand stole towards Martin's pocket, Augustine suddenly was upon him, gripping him by the wrist.

"Now then, boys," he said, "let's see what Dad has in his hand, shall we?"

They crowded round. This was as good as the Pictures any day.

Of course the almost engagingly artless plotter had the key. Augustine held it up, twirling it gently for all to see. Languor had descended on him once again.

"I think Dad had better go home and have a little rest, don't you?" he suggested with great sweetness.

The poor devil turned and bolted, muttering ineffectual malediction.

"And now to let the lady out!"

Augustine unlocked the door. The crowd surged in behind him.

"You see this little contraption?" he said. "I had some slight inkling of what our dear Carter had in his little head, so I had this put on weeks ago. It's lucky on the whole."

The contraption was a little hollow half-ball made of wood, and looking something like a large poached egg.

Its edges were flattened out and nailed over and round the keyhole. No key could go through it. On the other hand, the place could be locked up for the night from outside as if it had not been there. The wood of the "contraption" being the same as the wood of the door in colour, it was hardly noticeable.

Katie, tearful and shame-stricken, emerged from her durance.

"Poor child! Come and have tea with Mrs. May!" said Martin impulsively. The crowd, being composed of people not without intuitions, recognized the kindness and cleanliness of Martin's relations with his little typist. One or two of the more besotted indulged in grins and winks. The rest liked him from that moment more than they had ever done before. The episode was over.

"Fairfax, you god from the machine, come in and talk to me!" cried Martin, after depositing a tear-stained Katie at Alison's tolerant side. "Goodness knows what you've delivered me from!"

"Merely an action for indecent assault, if not attempted rape," said Augustine with slightly overdone nonchalance.

"Good Lord! Who'd have thought Carter had all that in him! I thought you'd all maligned the poor brute, rather. He's been as mild as milk to me."

"H'm, yes. Venom's not a pretty thing. Unless he absolutely tries to do you in down a dark turning, I think he's pretty well discredited now!"

"Fairfax," said Martin earnestly, "doesn't it ever

terrify you, all this silly ‘venom’ stuff? Why *can’t* men take each other as—well, just as fellow-men! Is it hopeless to hope for it? Here I came (Shelley too) bursting with comradeship and all the rest of it: and they won’t play. What’s wrong with us? What should one do?”

“It’s not what you do—it’s what you are.”

“Well, we’re good sorts—I swear we are!”

“You are. I know. I believe every one here knows too. It isn’t that. It’s the cut of your jib, the way you speak and look and act, the money they think you have—your class, in fact.”

“But that’s such drivel! That’s as much an accident as the colour of our eyes. They can’t blame us for that. It’s simply silly!”

“I don’t know that it is. Take a woman here who’s no older than Mrs. Burke, but who’s been married at seventeen and had a child a year ever since, and got up far too soon and lost her figure, and slaved far too hard, and lost her teeth and can’t afford to have ‘em in, and let her hair go dull because she’s too tired to touch it much. Would she be human if she didn’t think ‘It’s all very well!’ . . . when your wife tries to show her they’re on equal terms? They aren’t.”

“I know! Good God, I know. If one went about pitying them or patronizing them or playing the hypocrite, we’d expect to be stoned—and serve us right too! But I should have thought it was obvious that Shelley thinks, when she looks at that woman, ‘It’s the merest chance this isn’t me, and it’s a bitter

shame.' That *couldn't* hurt, if they would understand."

"Some few do understand. You mustn't think you haven't helped at all."

What with the shock of an hour ago and general disappointment, Martin was so near unmanly tears that Augustine was anxious to soothe him. He brightened up a little.

"Oh, here and there! But—Augustine—I love them!"

It was a real *cri de cœur* and it touched the older and more disillusioned heart.

"Well, go on loving them!" he said, but gently. "It's only where you insist on being loved back that you slip up."

"That's true," said Martin dejectedly.

"You ought to be the priest, not I," said Augustine suddenly. "I have no special love for them. My point of view is incurably aristocratic. Oh, I don't claim any special right to be. My 'people' are what's now called middle-class—lawyers and soldiers and parsons, and so forth. But I feel in my bones that it's half cant, this prate of equality. Education and tradition and centuries of bossing turn out an article that's bound to lead. If these people didn't know it, they wouldn't be so keen on 'opportunity.' They'd think they were all right as they are."

"Well, I speak as a fool, compared with you. But I'm convinced that they ought to *have* the opportunity. What they make of it is their look out. I believe there

won't be a penny to choose between our lordly selves and them."

" Well, *haven't* they the opportunity ? How much of it do they use ? Come, now ! They possess the greatest pictures in the world, in the National Gallery. How many go to see them ? They have finer pleasure-parks than any Duke (It's true they can't cut down the trees). For a shilling or two they can hear the finest music in the world ; they prefer the cinema. They have a magnificent library of their own in the British Museum as well as all the 'Frees.' Also in the British Museum, they have an absolutely unrivalled collection of the treasures of the ages. In fact, in many ways they share, or could share, in the privileges of millionaires ; and they have free schooling to guide them to them all."

" Y-es. But if you live from hand to mouth ? The British Museum, on an empty stomach——"

" An empty stomach is filled at the first rumble, more than half the time, these days—praise be ! You'll find most of the malcontents keep better tables than the Mays, say. Yet Alison is ' the daughter of a hundred Earls,' and all that sort of thing. Oh, I know it's all very fine, as I said myself to you, a few minutes ago. We *have* had luck they haven't had, and it's no good denying it. But we're canting all along the line just now. It makes me sick. Inside, we feel precisely the same as we did ; but it's as much as one's life is worth to say so. Look at women, shying at the good old words 'gentleman' and 'lady' and picking round

them with their ' not *quite* one of us, you understand ! ' It's all as false as false. Why, one day I was at a house where a woman told us that her grandfather had been a carpenter. Every one gazed at her in reverence, and breathed ' How *splendid* ! ' When she said good-bye, every one held her hand and looked into her eyes. And as soon as the door was shut, the hostess said, ' That accounts . . . ' and most of the guests murmured, ' Poor dear, one always *felt*. . . . ' No, it's sheer cant. I wanted to break out and say to the woman, ' Well, I can't see that that's anything to boast of—unless he happened to be an especially efficient carpenter. If he made flimsy things or ugly things, I don't see that he was a bit finer than my own grandfather, who was a jolly clever surgeon ! Better carve human beings admirably than spoil good wood.''

" Dear, dear ! " said Martin, laughing. " I've never heard you hold forth so feelingly—or so long ! Try it on in the pulpit, can't you ? If there'd been a cushion there just now, I bet you'd have hit the dust out of it ! "

" Well, I'm furious, for once. Look at that filthy brute just now. With a little more luck, he might have simply chawed up all your life and all that beautiful woman's. And the public sympathy would all have been on the side of the pore man's che-ild—even if she'd been the most vicious she-devil that ever was spawned ; instead of a poor little fool who ought to be safely married to a man who'd keep her from under our feet.

. . . No, I'm not a Christian at the moment, I'm

afraid. You are—but then it's happened to you. You've got the magnanimous *beau geste* to keep you up. If it had happened to—well, even to me—I flatter myself you'd have given Christian forgiveness a miss for ten minutes or thereabouts ! ”

“ Guess I would. My Lord ! if you hadn't had that thing put over the key-hole ! What an inspiration ! Thank God for your nasty suspicious nature ! ”

“ I should jolly well think so ! ”

And, as they smoked, a good love flowed between them.

## CHAPTER XXI

“SO there we are ! ” said Shelley. “ It’s no good pretending, like the dear little wives in the novels, that it’s the most unheard-of thing in the world. I knew it would happen ! ”

“ Oh, so did I, of course, sooner or later,” said Martin. He was not quite sure how he felt about it, except that it made him almost shy of Shelley.

“ The only thing is,” she went on, “ that your beloved Mumsey thinks we oughtn’t to stay here — ‘ we ’ meaning the three of us, you understand.”

“ Because of health and things ? ”

“ Exactly. She thinks the Heir ought to have a chance of more oxygen in his absurd little lungs. Marty ! how big do you suppose his lungs are now ? As big as cowslip-bells ? ”

“ Don’t suppose the whole little beggar’s much bigger, is he ? Oh, Shelley ! it *is* a marvel and a mystery, whatever you say.”

“ I didn’t say it wasn’t. I only mean that it’s an everyday marvel—which makes the whole world wonderful, of course.”

“ Daddy,” added Shelley reflectively.

"Mummy, if you come to that!"

"Apart from exchanging terms of abuse, what are we going to do about it? No need to move *yet*, is there?"

"Shouldn't think so. But I'm not going to risk your precious 'ealth, my child, and don't you think it! What about asking Mrs. May?"

"She's awfully undomestic, bless her! I don't think she knows one end of a baby from the other. Pity one can't ask Molly—or Augustine! I believe they'd both be as wise as owls about it. Only it's you that always consult Molly and me that always consults Augustine, and in this case it would hardly be The Thing. I thought we'd left The Thing behind us when we came Eastward Ho! but we haven't really."

"Those two do mean a lot to us," said Martin. His brow was slightly puckered at the thought of leaving them.

"They do, don't they? Why aren't I jealous of Molly, I wonder, or you of Augustine? We ought to be."

"Because, *au fond*, we know very well they belong to each other."

"I suppose they do. But, if they do, why don't they?"

"I sort of feel they couldn't be a Married Couple—don't you?"

"Yes. But I don't know why. It would take a cataclysm to make Augustine 'talk.' "

The cataclysm was to come.

Among the few slum-dwellers who had made friends with Shelley was Molly's burglar. He was an amiable ruffian who occasionally visited his child at Molly's school, and delighted all the children with his tricks and carefully restrained humours. Molly treated him precisely as she would have treated any other visitor, male or female. She came as near being no respecter of persons as any mortal ever comes. Shelley noticed her 'one manner' with all and sundry, and tried valiantly to copy it. Self-consciousness, and an irrepressible sense of class-difference, greatly to her humiliation, made the result appear a pose.

With Molly's burglar she had tried to be as with her ordinary male friends. The effect was an incongruous familiarity that gave the favoured gentleman an impression so ludicrous that poor Shelley would have fled from him if she had guessed at it. He thought her a showy little piece o' skirt, with not much you'd 'ave to teach 'er. As different from Miss Cairns . . . ! Now, there *was* a lady, if you like !

The awful climax came when, one sad day, Shelley asked Molly's burglar if he ever condescended to clean windows when burgling was slack.

" You could do it in the daytime, couldn't you ? " she said. " Then if you had a really urgent crib to crack, you could do that after dark ? "

He grinned and looked at her, stroking a bristly upper lip. Molly glanced at him and frowned a little. The persiflage that suited Shelley's friends would never

suit her burglar, as Molly knew well. She meant to caution Shelley.

“How about coming home with me now?” went on that misguided philanthropist. “I can give you a cup of tea after you’ve done them, if you care for it—with something solid, if you want it. I have some sausages, I know.”

“Is Martin at home?” asked Molly carelessly.

“Oh, yes, he always is at tea-time. Well, Mr. Bagram, will you come?”

“Don’t mind if I do,” said Mr. Bagram, lurching to his feet.

The odd pair went off together. Molly had a presentiment of danger. It was difficult to show Shelley how the “free and equal” manner that was natural to herself sat somehow wrongly on her lovely friend. Shelley’s cap of liberty seemed always fancy-dress, as worn by Shelley, and to possess all the provocative allure of fancy-dress.

The pair made their way to the Burkes’ little house. Shelley was uncomfortably aware of furtive grins exchanged between Mr. Bagram and sundry members of his social circle whom they passed. His was not the reverential ‘Bless-her-heart—she’s-an-angel-out-of-’eaven’ attitude that she had half expected when she came to the Vale. However ultra-modern you may be, you probably take time to shake off memories of the little books that people gave you when you were growing up—dear little books, full of kind, unselfish ladies

and wet-eyed grateful poor. Mr. Begram was not wet-eyed in any pleasant, gratifying way.

Shelley used her latch-key, and he stumbled in upon her heels. The tiny hall was dark as tiny halls in London are. For a moment, the contiguity of her visitor became vehemently apparent. She hastily threw open the drawing-room door. No one was in the room.

“Martin!” she called, standing at the bottom of the stairs.

Martin was obviously out. In the Burkes’ house, a tolerably loud whisper could usually be heard from the kitchen to the bedrooms. Shelley felt a curious wave of fear. It was a new sensation to her. As she turned back into the drawing-room to face her guest, it may have been reflected in her eyes.

There is nothing so dangerous as to show a bad dog that you fear his teeth. Begram’s small eyes lit up with a queer light.

“Gentleman not at ‘ome?” he asked.

“N—o,” said Shelley, “he’s certain to be here in a minute. He never misses tea with me.”

Begram gave a quick glance round the room, as if he were summing up its contents. Nothing looked particularly valuable. His look swept the window, and the pavement leading to the house. It was abominably quiet in the road to-day, thought Shelley, who was by this time definitely frightened. She summoned all her presence of mind.

“This is the window I want cleaned,” she said, in an

airy fashion that she hoped was business-like. I'll tell the little girl to bring you cloths and a pail." She turned as if to go to the kitchen.

Begram planted his bulk against the door.

"No 'urry,'" he said thickly, "your gurl, she's gone 'ome to 'er mother. I meet 'er as I come along to Miss Cairns's. 'Er mother's ill. She'll 'ave left yer a note."

"Oh, then I'll get the things myself," said Shelley, fully resolving to slip out of the house. She recognized the hunter's gleam, though she had never seen it on such a brutal face. Class refines but does not greatly alter it.

"No 'urry,'" said the man again, coming a little nearer her. Shelley slid over to the window, her hand closing on a paper-weight that lay upon a writing-table in the bay. She fingered it, as if absently, and made a pretence of looking after an imaginary passer-by.

"It's stuffy in here," she said, and threw the window suddenly open.

The floor was raised above the street, so that, a little way back in the room, no passer-by could see in. Shelley kept close to the sill, one hand gripping it, the other closed upon the paper-weight.

Begram growled under his breath. He made a long arm, caught her skirt, and drew her backwards towards him. She gave a cry, and hurled the paper-weight, not at him, but through the open window. It fell with a clatter into the street, smashing upon the pavement. At the same moment came a blessed sound of

running footsteps. A shout came through from the street.

"Anything wrong? Mrs. Burke, are you there?"

"Augustine! Yes!" cried Shelley, and fell in a heap on the floor as Begram let go.

Begram dashed out of the room and along the passage, through the kitchen, and out at the back-yard door, locking it noisily behind him.

Augustine set his shoulders to the hall-door. It creaked agonizingly, but did not give.

"Oh, don't do that!" gasped Shelley. "I'll let you in."

She tottered to the door and opened it. He came in, looking white and anxious.

Shelley leaned against the passage-wall.

"Oh!" she said, and gave a shuddering sigh.

Augustine took her in his arms and buried her face against his cassocked chest.

"There! There!" he cried, patting her head like any mother. "You're all safe now. You're safe, dear!" His voice was extraordinarily tender.

She looked up into benignant eyes.

"It's all right, thank you," she said with a little sobbing laugh. "I didn't know I was a funk before! Nice modern female . . .!"

"Yes, you're all right." Abruptly he released her. They went into the drawing-room, and there she told him the little that had happened, and the much that she had dreaded.

So cruel a look came over his face that she hardly

recognized it as the motherly countenance of five minutes before.

“Oh, it wasn’t quite his fault ! ” she said. “I expect I wasn’t dignified enough. He didn’t understand.”

“It would have been my proud privilege to make the beast understand if I’d come before he got away ! The *beast* ! ”

“Is this the language of a Christian clergyman ? ”

Shelley was herself again. The amazing moments in Augustine’s arms had turned the hurtful current of her blood, as he perhaps deliberately intended. Her colour came back. She looked at him with merry eyes that turned a little conscious.

He looked steadily back at her, his face flushing ; then he, too, smiled, and shook his head.

“No,” he said irrelevantly, “I don’t, you know ! Lovely as you are. Nor do you ! ”

“I suppose not. Because of Martin.”

“Yes. And because of Molly.”

“Augustine—tell me about Molly ! You never have.”

“I feel I could tell you anything just now. It breaks ice, doesn’t it ? an episode like this. But there’s nothing one *can* tell, exactly. Ask what you like.”

“Well, if I may butt in . . . why didn’t you two marry ? ”

“We made a try. You know that, I suppose ? ”

“Alison told me something—very little.”

"And you wondered. I'm not surprised. I sometimes wonder now. She is the mate out of the universe for me. I know it's talking like a novelette, but I'm not fit to black her shoes. Or rather, that's just about what I *am* fit for."

"Oh, come!" said Shelley. "Molly's a darling, but she'd loathe to be canonized *à la* Little Eva! She's the most human thing I ever struck."

"So she is—but I'm sub-human in some ways. She's humanity at its highest. Oh, well—we were talking of why it didn't end in marriage. We liked each other's company so well that at last we hardly had to talk. Everything seemed to get itself understood without it. And then one day she was lonely or I was sentimental, or whatever it was, and I had the mad idea that I could keep snow in a warm soup-plate."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Oh, you understand, I think! Perhaps you'll say I cheapen an institution that you naturally believe in. I think the average marriage may be good and sound and true and faithful. *Voilà tout.* What we had—what we have now—is something that the average marriage would treat as Begram's boot would treat a bit of apple-blossom. It's no good. You may have the most delicate relations with each other in marriage. *Something dies.* It dies whether you talk about poetry together or the dinner or the drains. Oh, affection doesn't! I've known affection last a lifetime. But the half is greater than the whole—believe me! The things you never say are what holds the veil safe round

the shrine. In marriage, everything is said. You exchange the golden apple for a vegetable marrow. That is why."

"Well, I think it's anaemic!" said Shelley stoutly, though her heart sank at what something kept resolutely in the distance was insistently whispering, whispering. "I think it's cowardly too! You ought to feel that you can stand anything, so long as you have each other."

"Perhaps I do feel that. 'Who wins his love shall lose her.' What could marriage give us that we haven't got? She doesn't crave for the physical side of life . . . I feel what you are thinking. You are right. I am not her counterpart, though I may be her complement. I do crave, quite often, for the perfectly natural human joys. I shall find the woman who can give them perfectly naturally, and she will have no use for highfalutin nonsense, as she'll consider what we're talking of."

"Turn your collar first!" murmured Shelley, a little scandalized.

"My dear child!" said Augustine. "I will marry her in St. Paul's with ten bridesmaids if she likes! You don't suppose . . . ?"

"Sorry. My evil mind. But, Augustine, do you think any woman on God's earth will put up with your living in Molly's pocket?"

"I may have to see Molly less often. That won't make any special difference."

"Well, I only know that I'd be insulted to death if

anybody married *me* with the beef and porridge side of himself and kept the other side for some one else ! ” Shelley felt within herself the freemasonry of all young matronhood.

Augustine said nothing, but he smiled at her. Her vanity absorbed the compliment implied behind the smile. All the happy marriages on earth would never kill the flirt in Shelley.

“ It all sounds very fine,” she murmured, placated but resentful still, “ but I can’t see why you should be a creature so frightfully fine and good as all that.”

“ I told you I was sub-human,” said Augustine, “ the only thing you shall *not* call me is a prig ! ”

“ Well, I half understand, of course. But I still think it’s a pity.”

“ Well, we tried. Every one congratulated us. The parish could understand an engagement. They were clear at once that we’d been ‘ courting ’ all those months. They’ve never forgiven us for breaking off.”

“ How *did* you do it ? ”

“ Which ? Break on or break off ? ” He laughed a little.

“ Break off ! There really are limits to my vulgar curiosity ! ”

“ Oh, I remember coming in and looking at an Army and Navy Stores catalogue with her. House-linen or something. We both got wretcheder and wretcheder. At last she said ‘ *Don’t* let’s ! in that funny tiny voice she has when she’s awfully tired—you know it ! a sort of squeak.’ ”

“Was that all ? ”

“Absolutely all. It had jolly nearly got too late to save anything alive already. We didn’t see each other for a month. Then I dropped in one day and found her the same as ever. We went back to the *status quo*, and there we stay.”

“I see. Well, as you like it, it’s your own concern—and hers. But I’m still sorry for the poor perfectly natural lady. She’ll be a tiger without any Christian, won’t she ? You’ll only talk to her about the kitchen range ! ”

“My dear child, would you offer fern-seed to your cat ? We’ll talk about ‘the range’ as if it were the Himalayas. So it *will* be, to her. She’ll find me a most sympathetic companion.”

“How I hate the Superior Person ! ”

“Superior ! who says it’s superior ? She’ll be of far more use in this world than I have ever been. I quite grant that. If I can give her what she wants—a home and——”

“Children ? Yes. Don’t let’s be bashful.”

“And she can give me what *I* want—why the dickens shouldn’t she spend her off-time looking at sweet blouses in Kensington High Street, and I mine talking to Molly ? ”

“May I be there to see—that’s all ! ”

“She’s miles better-looking than Molly—that’s one comfort ! I can rub that in perpetually.”

“Oho ! She is concrete, then ? ”

“That’s just what she is. She’s a good-looking,

wholesome, clean-minded, young, affectionate woman, and I'm very fond of her. And if I've been seeming to sneer at her, I'm a cad. She's as far above me normally as Molly is abnormally: and she's coming here tomorrow, to have tea at my rooms. Will all of you come in and welcome her? "

"This is a day of violent shocks!" said Shelley faintly. "Yes, of course we will. Does . . . anyone else know?"

"Oh, I told Molly when it happened," said Augustine. Then he went away.

Shelley sat still when he had gone, the tears welling up into her eyes. There seemed no room for her, who had taken up all the room there was before her marriage. Augustine had Miss Concrete for the levels, and Molly for the heights. Daddy had his Rosaries and things: one could imagine him the fervent neophyte. Alison had her little rotund hero and her writing and her art. Martin . . . Here the tears turned to a strangled sob.

She saw quite clearly now. In her new, queer, absorbing interest in Augustine, had she not lost a little of the authentic magic of her marriage? Did not she and Martin take each other for granted? Was that an inevitable part of even the best marriages? "Il ya de bons mariages, mais il n'y en a pas de délicieux." Ah, but that was a Frenchman's physical point of view. "Délicieux" was not the word one wanted. It was too . . . succulent. There was a white fire that should have lasted, even if the other flame died down. Surely it was not out already? Had she let it die?

She sobbed now uncontrollably. The two shocks had left her weak, and her condition made her a shade hysterical. With relief she felt that it was her own husband now who roused her longing. It was not the comfort of his presence and his touch or his affection that she missed or doubted. It was something more than that.

There had been the telling him—about the baby. Shelley loathed emotional scenes about such matters of course. And yet . . . the off-hand ways of modern speech do jar at the big moments. Yet you can't use the other ways. Moderns would half die of sheer embarrassment. You cannot write them, either. Imagine having to meet the person again after writing “My beautiful, my own, my lover once—Narcissus ! We have walked in Paradise. Are you forgetting ? ” You simply couldn't ! They'd come in all full of something sensible. They'd think you dotty. Or sentimental. Or gushing. Ugh !

Martin wouldn't, though, if you took him at the right moment. One knew quite well that when he said “Old Thing ” he meant “ My queen.” Words are only sound, that mean anything you choose that they shall mean. One knew all that.

But what was that the girl said in the end of H. G. Wells's novel ? They had come down to villadom after heaven in the mountains.

“ The petals are falling. . . . ”

That was it. “ The petals are falling.” God, don't let them fall ! Not yet. Not ever.

The Wells man understood. He said "Pulse of my blood, I know ! I understand." Martin would say "Old Thing, of course I don't forget. What do you take me for ?" It would mean just the same. . . . Would it ? One would, just for once, like Love to claim its own language back from the days of romance. Nothing would have induced Dante to call Beatrice "Old Thing." But then—*she had not married him*. That was where the real dread came in. Augustine ! You have terrified me. "Keeping snow on a warm soup-plate." . . .

Martin tore in, white and shaking.

"*Beautiful*," he said, "*they haven't hurt you ?*"

He knelt down at her side and put his arms all round her.

"God, You *are* good !" said Shelley in her prayers that night. "Why was I afraid ? "

## CHAPTER XXII

“ **W**E’D better clear out of here,” said Martin dolefully.

The whole Inner Circle were sitting in the Vicarage drawing-room, exhausted after civilities to the future Mother Augustine. She had turned out to be a tall and buxom girl with a keen sense of fun and utter non-apprehension of humour, a tenderness about the mouth that promised kindly things to posterity, and a clear, even strident, voice that made assertions and expected them to be respected. Shelley was glad to be relieved of all lurking compunctions. This was a young woman who would see that everything she had a right to expect was duly forthcoming. Of Molly she had very obviously no fear. For one thing, the sound goodness in her recognized its fellow; for another, Molly had evidently had every opportunity offered her and yet not landed the prey; for the third—and greatest—reason, Molly could not compete, either in looks or “style.” The bride-elect was not vulgar; nor was she showier than strong colouring and large proportions make any woman; but she and her feather stole extinguished Molly’s narrow form in its brown holland, and her nose was a sheer reflection on

Molly's profile. She would hold her own. "*Je main-tiendrai*" might well have been her family motto. Shelley saw with an inward smile that Augustine had a secret pride in her.

"After all, she will be good for him," she decided, "anything so truly normal is wanted in this place."

And now "this place" was to know them no more. The burglar episode, coming so soon after Martin's encounter with the ingenious Mr. Carter, "put the lid," as he remarked, on the expostulations of his mother. It was a bit humiliating to leave the Vale with no better fruits of philanthropy than two cases of assault and a new pub.—so he exaggerated, in his soreness; but to have Shelley shaken up and frightened, and her baby perhaps injured—that was a bit too strong. Failure is failure. They must leave. The little house would let again. In any case, it only had ten months to run to the end of its lease.

"I don't believe you can do a blessed thing unless you've got either millions or a collar that fastens at the back," he grumbled, "amateur secular tinkering's no good. I shall never have the millions. Question is whether I'm orthodox enough for the other thing—the 'forty stripes save one,' and so forth."

"If you can manage the Thirty-Niners with some sort of conscience left," said Alison, "you'd make a really popular parson. I didn't want you to turn your collar at first, if you remember. I do now. You've shown that you're in earnest; and you have a way with the people that will make them trust you, once

they know where they are with you. Don't run away with the idea that you've been a failure here. You've got on better than we hoped. Don't we know about the stony ground? We ought to!"

"You are a brick," said Martin. He felt touched and comforted. The leaving these dear people was the worst of all.

"Where will you go?" asked Augustine, to break the faintly uncomfortable pause that ensues after a Briton has said anything whatsoever in a tone touched with emotion.

"Martin's mother says there's a lovely little flat in the Adelphi," answered Shelley, in a voice that had some eagerness. She was not averse from the idea of returning to a world that had always idolized her. The sudden "settling down" of Augustine had made her realize that the Vale, unless greater results could be shown from the occupation of it by two children of light, was rather in the nature of a bushel, and no abiding city.

"We could always come from there and see how things were going here," she suggested, catching a woeful glance from Martin.

"I should feel like Francis Thompson's Jacob's ladder," he said discontentedly.

"Who's Francis Thompson's Jacob?" asked Alison, "and why should you feel like his ladder? The talk is too clever for me!"

"Oh, *you* know! 'Pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross,' "

"The Vale being Heaven! What a charming unsolicited testimonial!"

"Well, it has angels." He smiled at her and looked past her at Molly. Alison saw, and sighed. It was sad that young folk started with motives that could hardly be higher, and came down always to the purely human.

However, she did not make the mistake of imagining that the inward and spiritual life of either of her friends had perished because Molly and Augustine had a little filled the foreground. It was the spirituality in Molly that held Martin. Of Shelley she was never quite so sure. The child had been a little spoilt. At heart she was as sound and good as any beauty could be without sprouting wings. Alison's heart ached to lose her Children. She, too, was not altogether unaffected by the sudden metamorphosis of Augustine.

"There is always my own man," she thought, "and Molly. More than ever, Molly—now." But she was sad.

It was a woebegone little group that stood upon the dingy platform a week later, and waved handkerchiefs after a train that was only taking the young Burkes to Charing Cross, but might have been an Arctic Expedition steamer for the forebodings that it left behind.

"The world will swallow them," said Molly sadly.

"Not it!" said Alison. "I've fixed one day a month when they will dine and tell us all about things. I'm an octopus when I've got a grip on people. At

first they'll come. Then they'll want to come. Then they'll mean to come. Then they'll forget to come. That's where my tentacles will be useful. We'll go and fetch them if they don't!"

Slightly cheered, the four went home to tea and rather silently ate buttered buns, brought in by a red-eyed Gladys, who was perhaps Shelley's most whole-hearted worshipper in England.

When the Burkes arrived at the Adelphi flat, to find their furniture already installed, under the superintendence of Martin's mother, that lady had some news for them.

"Madge is dead," she told them gravely.

## CHAPTER XXIII

YES, I appear in this act, chair and all—and more than all. So much has come into my life that I am choked with gratitude. My sorry scheme has been seized by a Hand I have denied, and moulded so near to the heart's desire that I could almost bless the very fool of a fall at Grasmere that has helped my all but atheism these long years.

Madge's death appalled me. Here was a creature, young, strong, hard, beautiful and selfish, and therefore armoured against any ordinary slings and arrows. To live self-satisfied, in circumstances of prosperity, buckled against compassion, is probably as near happiness as most of us attain. Madge had enjoyed the backcloth of her life that showed an invalid husband in a spinal chair, with herself as Beauty chained to its rubber wheels.

“ Poor Mrs. Carey ! ” she imagined the world's voice. “ Such a handsome woman. So devoted ! What a life ! ”

And here am I, my useless body stronger than before, my affections satisfied at last. And Madge's whiteness is a dish for worms. Poor beauty, I would honestly

restore you if I had the chance ; but I cannot pretend it would not cost me hell. Never again could I go back to the existence I had all but grown to tolerate—not after this.

Mabel Burke and Buffer came to stay with me. I had asked for Buffer, or her mother would have come alone. I think that Mabel, in her wise simplicity, had gauged a little the position between Madge and me. Nothing can deceive a woman of her type when confronted with the Madge type. Mabel knew I had no wife as many a paralytic has one. The physical bond, enormously powerful element though it can be, is the lesser side of the marriage tie. The pious folk are right enough.

She brought me Buffer, and for many months she left her with me. Small danger of a scandal, with a gallant like myself. It had its bitter side, that great immunity of mine. But how else should I have had those months of heaven ? To see that fair face full of tenderness from its morning freshness to its evening mystery ; to hear the warm inflexions of the soft, grave voice ; to feel the kind, small hand in mine while she read out to me ; to hear her sing to me in the dusk, the piano candles just touching her brown-gold hair to a halo—it made up for years of bitterness and hunger, of disappointment and frustration of the body and the soul.

As days went on I told her everything—my little saint. She knew that love had never really come my way. I had not spoken to her of Adela ; but Adela's,

if even real love, was not what a man desires when he dreams of remoulding sorry schemes.

For long months we grew nearer to each other's core. Out of some dim respect for that poor, beautiful, dead woman, we were conventional enough to wait a year. Then there came a tension. It was half delicious, half frustrating. There were silences between us—not divine, as earlier silences had been ; disturbing, rather, full of secret questionings. More and more a thought would make my heart beat. I would fight it fifty times a day. Chain this loveliness for ever to a spinal chair ? Take advantage of an angel's visit to nail its gleaming wings ? No, I fought.

Then she took arms against me.

The strain had grown until I had to end it. Who knows what subconscious hope I had in breaking silence with the words I used ?

“ Buffer,” I said, one evening after dinner. We sat by firelight, as we often did. Her bright eyes dreamed into the flames.

“ Arthur,” said her voice, that always thrilled me with the word. Perhaps there is no greater test than the way a woman says your name. This time, it might as well have been “ Beloved ” that she said.

“ You had better go and leave me. Get it over.” I made an honest effort to get all hoarseness out of my own tones. There should be no unmanly pleading on my side.

Buffer gave a little laugh and put her hand for me to take.

I would not touch it.

"You'll outstay your welcome," I said gruffly, trying to sound a playful note.

"Shall I?" said she, with much placidity. "We'll see, after ten years or so, if I've done that."

My heart began to thump. Log though I am, my heart has not grown paralysed.

"What is the good, my dear?" I asked her, "it will have to come, some time. It's better to be a bear with a sore head—even a sore heart—than a dog in the manger. You will marry."

"I hope so—yes."

My heart stopped beating for a second.

"Is there——?" I began.

"Arthur," said my dear, kneeling down by my chair, her fair face looking down at me, "I think you love me."

I hid my face with both my hands.

She drew them down.

"Look at me, dear," she said, "you know I wouldn't lie to you? I—care so much that if you never marry me I shall miss all the happiness—all the happiness——" Her voice broke.

"You child, how can I marry you? Can a log marry? You don't know what——" I floundered.

"Listen," she said, her fair face burning. "I would give anything in the world to be your real wife. I would love to—bear your children, Arthur. Next to that, just to be with you always is the only thing I crave for; to love you as much as I want to. *Don't send me away!*"

Send her away? Push away heaven? If I could have knelt to her! . . . I drew her down to me and kissed her as a man in the desert drinks when at last he comes on water.

To my surprise, I found that all the Burkes expected it—welcomed me! I knew them far too well to think that my moderate eligibility, my potty little future title and fairly comfortable income could weigh overmuch with them. Buffer had met far bigger “matches.” It seems that they had known for years that she had cared for me. Miracles must be accepted, and not questioned. I accepted this one. It was all too smooth—at first.

And then I did what nearly every man regrets. I told her everything that had been significant in my life. It is that craving for full confidence between man and his mate that risks so many happinesses. Women feel it, as a rule, more even than a man. I could not talk with openness to Buffer of my life with Madge, unless I told her of the Adela episode. Of course, I never willingly gave Adela’s secret, even to her. I thought she knew nothing whatever of it, and would never try to identify the woman. I underrated her intelligence—her intuition. She had gathered from her own observation, as well as from stray words dropped by her guileless father, something of the situation long ago. My wretched confidences supplied the last piece missing out of the mosaic.

She fell so silent that I looked up at her in terror. “Are you disgusted?” I asked her. “Did you

think that I was worthy to kiss the hem of your little frock? Or why don't you speak to me?"

"No, no, it isn't that!" she cried. "It's this. You ought to marry Cousin Adela."

"Marry!" . . . I felt dumbfounded. A few years ago, my own conscience would have said to me what Buffer said. Now, since my accident—above all, since the Martin episode—the whole possibility had vanished from my mind. It was a travesty, a thing grotesque. How could I make it clear to her? I could not say, in brutal words: "The woman ceased to love me when I ceased to feed her senses. Your own young brother could have succeeded me for the asking. She and I as man and wife would be a pair to make the angels weep. If she kept you from me I should detest her, and the wretched strain of my life in hiding it from her would be worse than any paralysis. She would no doubt pose as devoted, and feel picturesque in doing it. She might perhaps get some slight satisfaction out of the 'position'; though, as it is, she has her own courtesy title and as much of my income as she cares to take. I have nothing to offer her but the wreck of my one chance of Paradise."

Instead of saying this, I gasped. She thought me ill, and grew at once so tender that we shelved the ugly question for the time.

But she was not to be persuaded. Again and again, whenever I opposed the horrid notion, she was firm. If Adela Curtis refused me, I was free, but not before. Adela must be given a fair chance, an unprejudiced

clear offer of my wretched hand. If she, not knowing anything of Buffer, still declined, then I could have my happiness.

My heart half full of hope and half of terror and despair, I wrote to Adela, who was now back with Doady at the flat in Regent's Park, after prolonged wandering in her Swiss *pensions*. She did not very often visit me. My hope was that her mind had jumped to right conclusions on finding Buffer practically domesticated with me. It is true that either the Major or Mrs. Burke were pretty often in residence, to avert even the breath of scandal (ironically improbable !) and that I had taken care that Adela's rare visits should coincide with theirs. At the same time, I hardly thought that I had hidden, so well as to deceive, the adoration that I felt for my gentle nurse. It surely spoke in every look of mine, every tone of my voice ?

I put it to the touch and wrote to Adela.

She came to tea with me, handsome, young-looking, sumptuous in cheap velveteen and fur. Adela is emphatically of the type that easily looks sumptuous. She has great excuse for feeling herself born to purple and fine linen. She makes the ordinary mauves and calicoes look the thing they ape.

" Well, how's my Arthur ? " she said lightly.

The " my " alarmed my fatuous apprehensions. The tone, however, reassured me. Heavy sentiment had mercifully left her manner ever since the Martin episode. I dare say she regretted having let us all see quite so plainly that the Abelard and Héloïse pose had died a

violent death. I sound perhaps a brute to Adela : the real makes the false look uglier than it looked without the contrast. I say again that if she had loved me after I was crippled . . . thank God that she did not.

It was the hardest work I ever did, that leading up to a proposal—one that should not betray that all my being was desiring the wrong answer. At last I got it out.

“ It seems an outrage, asking a beautiful woman to take pity on a wreck,” I said, my very soul sick, “ but—can you find it in your heart to marry me, Adela ? Such as I have I offer you. I should try for the rest of my life to see that you never regretted it.”

Adela’s face changed, aged, grew almost grotesque with real emotion. Her mouth fell open. Her eyes filled with a sort of horror. She answered not a word. Then, to my distressed bewilderment, she flung her arms down on a table and her head upon them.

I should have felt that an hysterical scene, just then, was the one thing I could not bear ; but so potent is sincerity that it cannot be mistaken. For once a real gust of anguish had seized Adela. Sobs—ugly, tearing sobs like hiccups, were bursting from her. Her feet shuffled as if she were in the clutch of some grotesque and poignant bodily torture.

“ For God’s sake ! ” I said. I tried to lift myself. Of course I could not. Fine protector and consoler of women I should make !

She raised a face all drowned and twitching.

“ I am a fool,” she said, mopping her eyes and trying

to control her voice. "It's over now—Don't mind me—I'm distressing you."

"Of course you are. But what is it?"

Already I half understood.

"Oh, can't you understand?" She stood in front of me, the tears still pouring down her face. "Just a few years ago, it would have been—all Paradise—" She choked.

"Yes, dear, I know," I said, as gently as I could.

"And now—*now*—when I hardly care, and you don't (if you ever did!) and we can never love again in any of the real ways, and I am growing old—Oh, why does God mock me with happiness *now*?"

The almost brutal truth of her was bracing to me.

"Listen, Adela," I said, "if you are good enough and brave enough to marry me, I will show you strong affection and gratitude all the days of my life."

"My dear," she said, "you'll get much more than that—and give much more. You may not know it, but you will. And as for me—well, I was going to tell you." She gave a curious half-croak, half-laugh. "I'm going to marry a fat stockbroker! He adores me, and he's rich, and I shall feel eighteen, an old man's darling. So you see, I'm off your hands."

"For God's sake, Adela!"

"Oh, don't you worry! I like him well enough. Before I came to-day I felt quite cock-a-hoop about him! I know I've posed and posed until you sickened of me. Half the time I almost believed in myself. I wanted you—and I half got you. I wanted Martin

and I didn't get him. Now somebody wants *me*, and he's not at all so bad. What passions I had are cooling, and my vanity is satisfied. I want physical comfort and social position, and I shall have them both. And I'll be a decent wife to him. He wants me to give cosy little dinners to his cronies and play piquet when we're alone. He has a regular mansion at Surbiton. So that's that ! It was only the Might-have-Been, the supreme irony, that clutched at me like that."

With a relief so vast it nearly choked me, I believed her.

What is there in violence that is so impressive, so satisfying ? We of the civilized races loathe it in principle, and in fact desire it constantly in every nerve. Is that the cause of War ? Is the stark sincerity of violence the satisfying element ? Life is all little pleasant tickles, little irritating pricks. In each case, you deal the part affected a vicious blow ; the pain of the blow consoles you.

I sympathize from my heart with the old woman who adored the sea at her first view of it because, at last, here was *enough* of something. That preposterous mass of water was a violent sufficiency to her soul. Every day we are frustrated, irritated by a pallid insufficiency. The young are in revolt against it. That is why you get, for namby-pamby waltz tunes, a furious Jazz band, a noise that slaps your ear-drums. That is why our women drop their mauves and pinks and washy blues and go superb and violent in orange, in scarlet, and in yellow. Who has not tingled with

exasperation at the genteel and mincing woman whom he must not shake till her teeth rattle, the maddening child he may not spank till it sees reason, the man with the fatuous smile he may not strike from the mouth, the glorious tune he must hear droned listlessly (I have heard the *Venite Adoremus* given so feebly that I nearly joined in with a shout that would have taken the roof off the decorous church and landed myself in prison probably, for brawling), the great emotion strangled on the stage by perfunctory acting, the vapid kiss that cannot fire to ecstasy? All these half-inhibited expressions scarify our nerves. When a man like me lies, day by day, compulsorily supine, his only violence is in words. He longs for some vicarious fury of sincerity. I felt the tragic ugliness of Adela, the convulsion of her features, the raucous misery of her voice, one million times more impressive than all her years of handsome looks, pretty smiles, sweet tones and sham emotions. If there had been no Buffer in my life, that moment might have made her slave of me. I would have turned each wretched power I had to bear on her. I would have fought, until I killed it, her bitter longing for the past, and brought that past to life again, with real love this time added. As it was, I loved another woman; and I knew that Adela could not hold at that level. I knew her Surbiton stockbroker with the Napier car would make her happy, nearly to the limit of her chance of happiness. All was for the best, especially the terrible moment when she was able to liberate herself and me, for an instant, from our smug half-feelings.

Perhaps all nakedness, even of the deformed, is in the end more beautiful than when we clothe it. I have seen a man's tall hat perched on the head of the Venus de Milo. That most chaste of statues looked at once fit for the decoration of a tenth-rate brothel. Life is queer.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**O**N a certain day in 19— the following paragraph appeared in a county paper :

“ The many friends of Major and Mrs. Burke, who celebrated their Golden Wedding among us this summer, will rejoice at the promotion of their son, our popular Dean, to the Bishopric of Barham. Bishop Burke will have the distinction of being among the youngest Bishops on record, actually the youngest (or so we are informed) living at the present moment. He and his wife, still one of our leading beauties, and his very popular family, will be sadly missed by all.”

With emendations, this paragraph was repeated in a paper seen at a Vicarage in a humble street in London Vale.

“ They *have* got up the ladder ! ” said little Mr. May, smiling through a trim white beard.

“ Well,” said Alison, who hardly looked much older, though her fair hair was ashen now. “ I was thinking they’d got down it ! ”

“ How do you mean, exactly, my dear ? ”  
Alison explained.

" Well, I don't know why we should assume that," said her husband. " Remember, Religion does wear silver slippers sometimes."

" You're quite right, and I'm a cranky old woman. I hated all that prosperity for our Children of Light. But, after all:

‘Even in a palace, Life may be lived well.’"

" Talking of palaces," said Mr. May, " I forget what happened to her father ? "

" Oh, when last I heard, he was still alive—infirm, but not doddery. Wonderful man ! "

" Shelley never thought he'd stick to Rome."

" No. She says now he wouldn't have, if he hadn't got so much into the limelight as a preacher and been made Monsignor. Since the days of Father Benson, no one has ever applied for so many Faculties. Shelley says the opposition he has met with from the parents of converts has just kept him going. Queer, fascinating man ! "

" Yes. The whole group was fascinating. . . . We are old now, Alison ! "

" Not we ! " said Alison stoutly, " but—we haven't seen them for five years. Charing Cross has won ! "

THE END.



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